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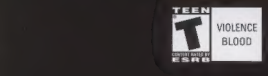

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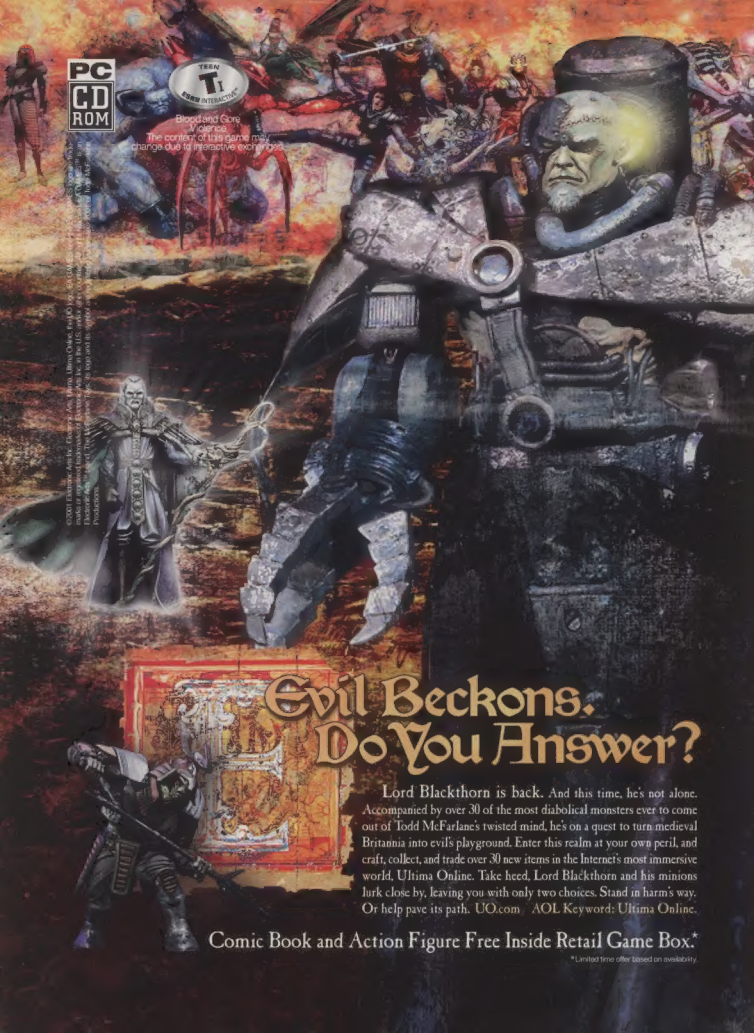
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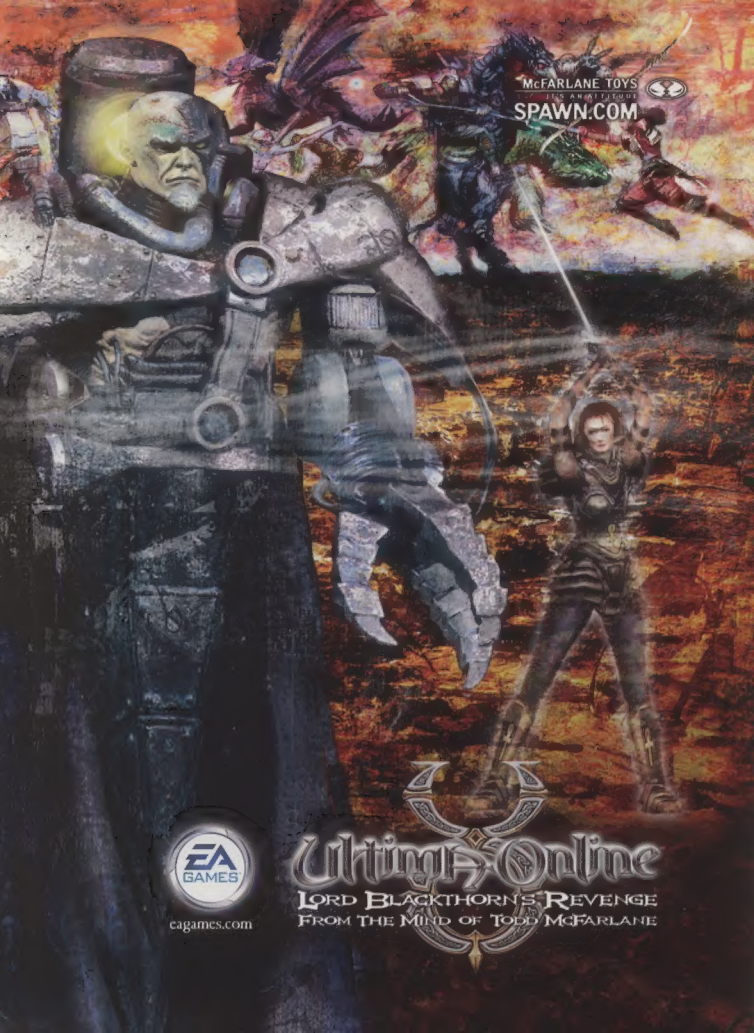
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letters

Dear Dr. Berk,

I am writing in regard to your fascinating and informative article on runes in the April 2002 *Realms of Fantasy*.

Your article is a treasure-trove of information I had not encountered before about runelore, though I did recognize several things. I was delighted by your presentation of the information, its depth, and the clear expertise shown in your handling of the subject. Your writing style is also very engaging.

Nevertheless, I am curious if you were perhaps intentionally obscure in some of the things you said, maybe simply to conform to the traditionally conservative style of Ph.D. writing, or to avoid getting into a discussion of the specifics of rune magic technique.

For instance, the antler tine charm. Would you be willing to agree that sympathetically, homeopathetically, and in analysis of the charm's wording

grows wild animal
Grows. Wild Animal.
Grows. Wild. Animal.
Grows wild, animal.

that this particular artifact is highly suggestive of magic focused on producing the British runic shaman's equivalent of Viagra? To me, that idea seems very compelling because of the "Ask for what you want in simple, specific terms" attitude of rune magic, which I was introduced to in Tony Willis's The Runic Workbook (Aquarian Press, 1980). A wonderful book! I am surprised you did not list it, though it lacks the best-books-in-the-field scholarly reference quality of the titles you listed in your reading list.

Again, I did enjoy your article very much, and have added it to my ever-growing collection of runelore.

Thanks for taking the time to read this, and I would welcome hearing from you, should you have time to respond. Hope to see you in print again soon as well.

Mark Harris
Little Rock, AR

Many thanks, Mr. Harris, for your kind words about my article. To briefly answer your question: Yes, I am cautious in some of my readings and interpretations of runic inscriptions. But I must pass the buck I'm afraid, for I believe that the carvers and users of early runic artifacts (like the antler in the article) allowed for this ambivalence. Such artifacts express a variety of realities simultaneously. So, might the carving of "Grow/s wild animal" be as you suggest, the early Saxon answer to Viagra? It might. But of course we don't even know if it was carved by a man. Ah! what if it was not? Perhaps She was a hunter, who Artemis-like, carried this charm and called to herself the power of those creatures she both hunted and loved? Or perhaps it was made by a simple wife who slipped the carved horn under her husband's pillow and quietly hoped for the best.

Ms. McCarthy,

I was in the process of letting my subscription die out and slowly riding off into the sunset of other periodicals when I realized that I was a little confused as to why I was leaving. I have enjoyed your magazine greatly in the past and continue to recommend it to others; I even purchased it as a gift subscription this year. I thought I was leaving because of a subtle shift in my own reading tastes and a chaotic need to prioritize too many books and too few waking moments. Upon what was likely too much self-examination I found there was more. I've come to dread these little editor/manuscript submitter catfights going on in the editorial and letters sections.

You put together what I truly believe is one of the best packages that I've come across. You don't need to justify yourself to some of these idiots who wouldn't be happy with first billing at a writer's convention including Stephen King. It's reminiscent of the drunken couple arguing at one of your favorite restaurants, makes little sense in the end and ensures that you'll question your next visit. Worse yet, it demeans the great work you and your staff do. Try to remember what it was like to have fun. Try to remember that when it first all came together and you thought to yourself, "They're paying me to read???????" (I know you do so much more than just read, but honestly, didn't you feel that way once?) As you can probably tell from the grammar I don't much care if you print this, but please consider it. I'll check back in from time to time.

Joe McDougall
Grass Lake, MI

Thanks very much, Joe. We try to do the best we can here, and sometimes we slip up—submissions get lost, or take longer than they should to get considered, or typos crop up, or lines get dropped—but given the fact that this is not The New Yorker *(which by the way has a four-month submission lag time), and is in fact being edited by one person in her spare bedroom, I think we do OK. And to tell the truth, every day I wake up and think, "They're paying me to read?!"*

Dear Ms. McCarthy,

I always look forward to your magazine,

REALMS OF FANTASY
VOLUME 8 NUMBER 5

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and the first thing I do is read the editorial and letters. No matter how long it may take me to read the rest of the magazine, those two parts I cover first. Until now I never thought I might write. For sure I've had things to say about it, but I never really felt motivated enough.

Then I read Mr. Harvey's letter.

I have been writing most of my life now, and as of yet I have not published anything. I have not blamed that on the editors who rejected me. This includes *Realms*. I learned, quite soon after I decided I had to write, what that meant. It meant that I would put my life, hopes, and dreams onto paper and offer that out to others. When that got rejected I would hold my heart tight, sigh, and figure out where to go next. Figure out how I might improve.

I was 13 when I understood that my every story was not going to be held as golden truth. I knew then that I had to be good in order for my story to even make it to the editor. I had to be good and submit the right thing to the right place.

Now, I wonder how many rejections Mr. Harvey has gotten to date. Only twice did I ever get anything other than a form rejection, and they were from much smaller magazines. The editors are not simply sitting around waiting for your brilliant story. My suggestion to Mr. Harvey is that he go to his nearest bookstore and pick up a copy of the *Writers Market*, and read the thing. If he had started there he would have learned what nearly every editor has said. You WILL get rejected, no matter how good you are. If you work hard enough at it, sooner or later you will get published.

Finally, just because Mr. Harvey got rejected gives him no right to insult your readers. I consider myself a long-term subscriber, and at least I am smart enough not to write to the magazine that rejected me and show my.... rear.

Keep up the good work Ms. McCarthy, I hope someday to be among the writers published in your magazine ... but then I plan to work for it.

Sarah Frix
Ft. Walton Beach, Florida

"Doc Nebula"–please see above!

Dear Editor:

I'm deeply impressed and sincerely appreciative of the honesty in your latest response to Harry S. Harvey's letter. When you talk about the "ungodly amount of time" that contributors have to wait to be discovered in the "enormous slushpile"... well, it doesn't really solve the problem (and I know you guys think it's a problem too, and thanks for that) but it certainly helps me a little to know there's an editor out there somewhere who at least recognizes the frustration we idiotic, unwanted, unknown authors go through. After having been dressed down by everyone from Steve Jackson to various readers and assistants to assistant editors at Baen, Del Rey, and Ballantine for having the temerity to imply that maybe, just MAYBE, if they say in their prospectus that they'll get back to an unsolicited submitter in 90 days, they should make an effort to, you know, get back to an unsolicited submitter in something remotely approximating 90 days, or, if they can't, do it in something less than, oh, 390 days, or, if they can't even do that, then they could at least, you know, apologize, and not call the submitter names because he makes some follow-up phone calls after nine months and sends some e-mails and snail mail wondering WHAT IN THE FUGG HAPPENED TO HIS MANUSCRIPT ... well, anyway, after having been told that I was unprofessional, would never make it in the business, didn't seem to understand the hardships of the editorial existence, and, you know, that I should probably just go off to an alternate timeline and DIE... well, after all that, reading your perhaps slightly exasperated words to Mr. Harvey just made me sigh and smile.

Mind you, I'm right there with Mr. Harvey, as well. The system sucks. From his letter, Mr. Harvey seems to be able to put words together reasonably well (unlike, say, Dean R. Koontz or Dale Brown, who have both made a billion dollars repackaging the same two or three illiterate manuscripts over and

Continued on page 79

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By Resa Nelson

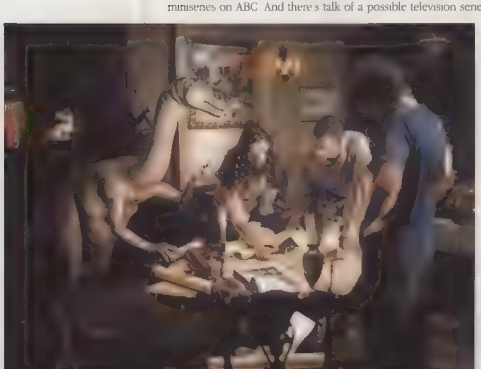
A new miniseries takes you inside the fantasy paintings of James Gurney.

Thirteen years ago James Gurney went to Boston on a mission. In 1989 the city hosted the World Science Fiction Convention, attended by about 7,000 writers, artists, editors, publishers, and fans from around the globe. Gurney was at work on a new concept. Primarily an artist, he brought some of his paintings to display at the convention's art show. His mission was to find out how fans would react to these paintings, which illustrated his new concept.

"The response from people there was really electrifying to me," Gurney says. "It made me willing to take the time to write the book. And it gave me the confidence to write the stories as well as doing the pictures."

Gurney's new concept was Dinotopia, an imaginary country where humans and dinosaurs co-exist in peace. In other words, a dinosaur utopia. Gurney wrote and illustrated *Dinotopia: A Land Apart From Time*, published in 1992. It landed on *The New York Times* best-seller list and won the Hugo and the World Fantasy awards. Gurney wrote and illustrated a sequel, *Dinotopia: The World Beneath*, published a few years later.

Beginning on Sunday, May 12, Hallmark Entertainment brings *Dinotopia* to television as a six-hour miniseries on ABC. And there's talk of a possible television series of 22 hour-long episodes, although no announcements have been made as of press time.



Marion (Katie Karr), David (Wentworth Miller), and Karl (Tyron Leitso) with Zippo in Hallmark Entertainment's miniseries Dinotopia. *RIGHT: Baby 26 was created by Jim Henson's Creature Shop.*

With a budget of $85 million, *Dinotopia* is poised to reign as the T-rex of fantasy television. It boasts 1,600 special effects shots, 1,200 of which include computer graphics. About 74 percent of the screen time is devoted to special effects. Why is this project so dependent on effects? The filmmakers' task was to create computer-generated dinosaurs that interact convincingly with human actors—and to create the fantasy utopia where dinosaurs and humans live together.

In other words, it wasn't just a matter of making realistic dinosaurs. It was also a matter of combining real movie sets with computer graphics to create magical, enormous cities and landscapes.

But what exactly is Dinotopia, and how did Gurney come to create it?

As a college student, Gurney studied archaeology at U.C. Berkeley. He began his career as a background painter for animated films. "I also did a lot of paperback covers for science fiction and fantasy books," Gurney says. "Alan Dean Foster, Tim Powers, people like that. A key part of what got me excited about doing fantasy was working with those books and doing paintings

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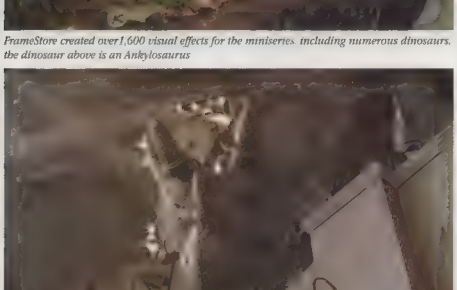
FrameStore created over 1,600 visual effects for the miniseries, including numerous dinosaurs, the dinosaur above is an Ankylosaurus



of castles and dinosaurs and fairies and elves As Gurney's career evolved, he worked as an archaeological illustrator for *National Geographic*

"This was a dream come true for me," Gurney says. "Because they sent me on location to all of these fabled sites, like Etruscan Italy. I was with archaeologists, looking at the sites. My job was to create their image of the fully realized world in oil paintings. Every evening after they'd worked at the site, I would ask them what their dream was as archaeologists, and they always would say the same thing as my dream: to discover a lost world.

'I realized, as an artist, I could paint an image of a place that's just beyond the edge of our dreams. I started out with a painting of a waterfall surrounding a city that looks very much like some of the hill towns of Italy. I was visiting on location with *National Geographic*. And that became Waterfall City. That was 1988.

"Then I did another painting of a parade of people and dinosaurs, which is on the cover of *Dinotopia*. I grouped those together with the idea of lost empires. And then I thought, wouldn't it be exciting if all of these cities could exist on the same island? We have a box of pencils on the middle of our dining room table, and I grabbed a pencil and I scribbled a shape, which became the shape of Dinotopia."

Gurney happened into a meeting with Ian Ballantine, the founder of Ballantine Books and publisher of the official *Lord of the Rings*. Ballantine looked at Gurney's paintings and the Dinotopia map he'd scribbled.

Gurney describes Ballantine's response: 'He said, 'It's got to be a book, and it's got to be 160 pages. It needs a scope.' And he was right. I told him, 'Ian, that'll mean I'm going to have to cut off all my illustration clients for 2 or 3 years to do all these pictures.'"

So Gurney took a leap of faith and gave his full attention to Dinotopia for the next few years.

Gurney's books are picture books intended for adults. Set in the 1860s, they're the fictional journals of Arthur Denison and his son, who find themselves shipwrecked on a strange, unknown continent. They soon learn that Dinotopia is the home of dinosaurs. The human population is made up of the descendants of people who also found themselves shipwrecked on this continent. The beauty of this concept is this: The shipwrecks happened throughout the course of human history. This means the culture of Dinotopia isn't just a blend of dinosaurs and humans. It's a blend of cultures, from ancient Egypt to the 1800s. The cities and environments of Dinotopia reflect this blend in ways ranging from architecture to the design of costumes (humans (and sometimes dinosaurs) wear).

"I worked on the original project at a time when dinosaurs were not popular at all," Gurney says. "Everyone thought I was crazy. It was a big risk for everyone to take, including the publisher."

And yet Hollywood fell in love at first sight with *Dinotopia*, thanks to its visual and cinematic nature. Ironically, one of Gurney's original goals was to paint images that would be impossible to film as live action. For several years, he succeeded.

The first studios interested in *Dinotopia* were the animators, including Disney and Hanna Barbera, but Gurney didn't want to see his work turned into a cartoon. Once the digital effects field began to boom, other movie studios pursued Gurney. In fact, *Dinotopia* was in development at Columbia Pictures for about four years, going so far as to bring in a director from George Lucas's Industrial Light & Magic. After the project went into turnaround, Hallmark Entertainment stepped into the picture.

In the 1990s, Hallmark Entertainment led the pack in bringing high-quality fantasy stories to television in the form of miniseries, including *Gulliver's Travels*, *The Odyssey*, *Merlin*, *Arabian Nights*, and *Jason and the Argonauts*. But Gurney had never seen any of Hallmark's fantasy miniseries. He had no idea what Hallmark Entertainment might be able to do with *Dinotopia*.

James Gurney doesn't own a television set.

"I rented a TV and they sent their videotapes to me," Gurney says. "I was impressed by a lot of their productions of the classics. I thought they would be a good candidate to bring *Dinotopia* to the screen, because of the scale of the commitment and the interest they have in family entertainment.

Gurney struck the deal with Hallmark Entertainment in 1999. He met with Executive Producer Robert Halmi to discuss the game plan for bringing *Dinotopia* to the small screen.

One challenge was coming up with a workable story. Part of the charm of the Dinotopia books is in the presentation. They're written as the lost journals of a scientist from the past. Inspired by writers like Robert Louis Stevenson and Jules Verne, Gurney wanted to tell the story of humans adapting to a dino-run society. The books are packed with vivid details about the world, the culture, dinosaurs, and nature—but there's not enough story to support a miniseries. Therefore, the task of writing the script was handed over to Simon Moore (*Under Suspicion, The Quick and the Dead*), a veteran screenwriter who received the Emmy for his *Gulliver's Travels* script.

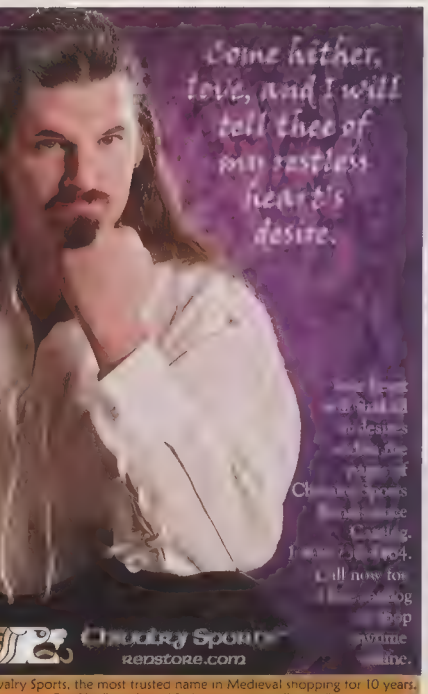
Gurney glows with approval. "I knew from the beginning that the movie version would have to make some changes to the story. As you can see when you read it, the Dinotopia books are very rambling and episodic—partly because it weaves together all those paintings I made—one of lost empires—and because the world is seen through the eyes of the main character, Arthur Denison. The focus isn't so much on his character development as it would need to be for the film. To fit the dramatic contours of the film, these changes would have to happen. We needed to do that without losing the core philosophy and entertainment and spirit of the original story.

"If you're going to make a lot of changes to the characters, it's better to change the entire script of the story, so your image of the original books can remain completely intact. At the same time, the screen story is new and fresh enough that you enter into it without having all the baggage of the book in your mind."

While it was important to find safe hands to write the script for *Dinotopia*, it was equally important to find the people who could bring both dinosaurs and a fantasy world to life. What better place than Framestore? The London-based post-production studio is responsible for the BBC's *Walking with Dinosaurs*, six 30-minute episodes that have been aired on the Discovery Channel in the United States. While the episodes play like a documentary, the "stars" are computer generated and very real looking dinosaurs.

Mike McGee co-founded Framestore in 1987, and he won Emmy awards for his work on *Walking with Dinosaurs* and *The Odyssey*. When McGee signed up as Visual Effects Supervisor for *Dinotopia*, he found himself heading up the most enormous project of his life.

"I had my first conversation with Robert Halmi just over two years ago," McGee says. "Robert had heard about our dinosaur work, and so he invited me down to talk about *Dinotopia* to see if we could take dinosaurs a step further. He had James Gurney's book to show me, and we discussed the challenges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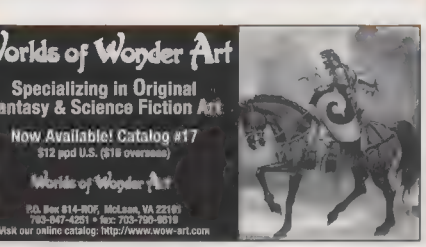
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involved in having people ride dinosaurs, and dinosaurs wearing costumes and interacting with humans. I then started thinking about how to develop techniques that could seamlessly join environments. I was involved right from the script writing stage, because we had to work out sequences that would surprise people and were not just straight lists from James Gurney's book. We were actually providing images that people wouldn't have seen in the book.

If you flick through James's book, every image in the book is a potential special effect in a film, because there's dinosaurs on nearly every frame. There are these fantastic sets that you couldn't possibly build, like a whole canyon full of habitation, so we knew we'd have to build some enormous CG sets, as well. In the end, we ended up with 1,600 visual effects shots. I think *Lord of the Rings* had 570 shots, so we're up to almost three times as many shots."

Although some of the effects shots are traditional visual effects, such as a plane crash, most of them have either a computer graphics dinosaur, a computer graphics model, or a computer graphics set.

The story of *Dinotopia* begins with the plane crash. Frank Scott (played by Stuart Wilson of *The Mask of Zorro*) is a wealthy American who appears to die in the crash. However, his two sons, Karl (Tyron Leitso of *Snow White: The Fairest of Them All*) and David (Wentworth Miller of TV's *Popular*), survive the crash and become castaways on Dinotopia. They soon meet leader-in-training Marion (Katie Carr of *Mrs Dalloway*) who leads them to Waterfall City, the capital of Dinotopia.

The challenge was to put a city on top of a waterfall," McGee says. "The way James had it in the book, the city sat on top of one major waterfall. So we decided to do something a bit different. We chose a location called Iguazu Falls, which is on the Brazilian-Argentine border. They're a multitiered waterfall system. So instead of having just one enormous drop of water, like Niagara or Victoria Falls, this has seven drops of water cascading down, down, down. We've gone for a look that's more ornamental, more fantastical. So we went to Brazil and filmed this waterfall for two weeks. We had to build water with CG, because water flows all through the city.

One of the most remarkable elements of Waterfall City is the side-by-side combination of live-action footage of real waterfalls with computer-graphics water. When you see Waterfall City, you'll see the marriage of real water with CG water—odds are, you won't be able to tell which is which.

Once in Waterfall City, Karl and David enroll in an academy to learn how to become Dinotopians. They soon meet Zippo, a Stenonychosaurus who speaks 17 human and Saurian languages. Because Zippo is a major character, eight FrameStore staff members (out of a total of 127 people working on *Dinotopia*) comprised the "Zippo team."

He has over 30 minutes of screen time, McGee says about Zippo. "It's a lot. He's in most of the key scenes. He's a lead CG character. He talks. He interacts with CG props. He wears glasses.

Because he has to talk and interact with other characters, he had to be given his own personality. "We're using the voice of Lee Evans, an English comedian, to do his voice. The Zippo team studied Lee Evans in several films to pick up on his mannerisms and his body language to put in Zippo's character.

While we were filming on set, we also used a technique to help the actors interact with Zippo. We used a mime artist wearing a Zippo suit. So he was on set wearing a rubber suit, rubber head, rubber tail, walking and interacting and delivering Zippo's lines in rehearsals. And then we would record that as a guide.

The visual effects artists used the recording of the Zippo mime to study how lighting hit his rubber suit, where the shadows fell, and to determine eye lines for the human actors, meaning, where the actors should be looking in order to make eye contact with a computer-generated character that will later be added into the scene.

Once the brothers join the Dinotopia academy, Karl is assigned to work at a Saurian hatchery, where he oversees the birth of an infant Chasmosaurus named 26. A few physical dinosaurs were created by Jim Henson's Creature Shop—including the hand-held baby, 26, and giant prehistoric reptiles called Mosasaurs.

Despite David's fear of heights, he's assigned to train to ride a flying dinosaur in Canyon City, an environment created by combining rock sets built on the largest soundstage at London's Pinewood Studios with a computer backdrop—everything behind the rock sets was computer generated. To accom-

ABOVE: One of the challenges the filmmakers faced was combining live actors with CG dinosaurs and environments. Here humans ride Brachiosaurs through Dinotopia
BELOW: Zippo is the lead CG character in the miniseries; it took a special team of eight people to bring him to the screen

plish this task, the visual effects artists first went to Arizona and shot digital stills from a helicopter. They pieced together these individual images and projected them onto a computer model. On top of that model, they built the habitations of Canyon City: walkways, viewing point, and flight decks.

I think the biggest challenge of *Dinotopia* was actually getting people to ride on the backs of dinosaurs," McGee says. "Traditionally, if you have someone riding on the back of a horse like in a Western, you have a bucking bronco jolting people up and down. You either pull that through the desert on a truck or you shoot it against a screen. But the animation of the unit that jolts you up and down is just an arbitrary cycle. What we wanted to do was take the dinosaur animation from the computer, feed that through a motion simulator, and create a rig so that the human actors could sit on a saddle and move up and down exactly in sync with the animation. We built something called a motion rig, which is a hydraulic system that takes data from the computer and then moves up and down, right to left, in accordance with the computer animation.

Then, because some of these creatures move with such velocity, we couldn't let this machine throw people around—that was just reality. There was a danger of the rig leaving the ground and the possibility of the actors getting thrown off. So we had to make a very heavy, metal structure to hold it to the ground, then drill the bolts into the floor, which gave it a fixed point of contact. And then we had speed controls on the creatures' run and walk cycles. If we put people on the rig and it was throwing them too violently, we could just tone down the speed of the leg lift of the creature.

The technology that McGee describes was created specifically to solve the problem of making humans riding dinosaurs look real. And it does look real. Previews of the mini-series show a world where dinosaurs and humans exist side-by-side in such a convincing way that it's difficult to believe that Dinotopia isn't a real place. It looks like the mini-series was shot on location—inside the fantasy paintings of James Gurney.

What about the future of *Dinotopia*? In regard to the possibility of an ongoing TV series, Gurney says, "I'm excited about the potential. It's something that Hallmark and ABC have been working toward for some time.

In the meantime, Gurney is at work on a new book. "I'm working on a new Dinotopia story, which continues the journal of Arthur Denison. He journeys east to a city called Chandara in Dinotopia. It's very much like a Marco Polo-type journey, where he encounters new cultures and new ways of relating to dinosaurs and things we haven't seen yet in Dinotopia. It'll be set in the 1860s and continue Arthur and Will's adventures into the fabled east."

For the latest news about Gurney's work and the *Dinotopia* miniseries, check out his Web site at www.dinotopia.com.

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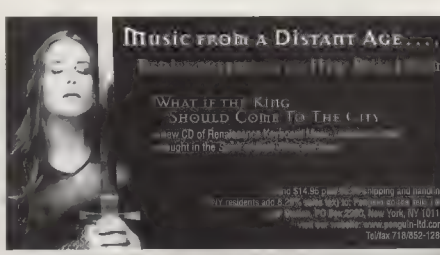
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By Gahan Wilson

Just when you thought a plague of devils was your worst problem ...

Demons gives fair warning by placing this quote from Kabir before its prologue. *Who is a holy person? The one who is aware of others suffering* and tailpieces it with a quote from Heraclitus *The waking have one world in common; sleepers have each a private world of his own*

Since ***Demons*** (by John Shirley; Del Rey, The Ballantine Publishing Group, NYC, hardcover; 372 pp., $25.00) concerns an apocalyptic and wonderfully varied manifestation of evil aided and abetted by the astounding indifference of mad elitists to all others suffering and since it was obviously written well before the horrendous events and repercussions of September 11 and the resoundingly revealing collapse of ENRON, I think that one could say without much fear of successful refutation that the book is prescient to a remarkable degree

It's actually two books sewn very effectively together: the first is called *Demons* and is essentially an introductory exercise that is a marvelously scary account of the sudden invasion of a plague of seven tribes of devils succinctly described in a handy little lexicon—ranging from Bugsys (parodies of humans complete with skin that resembles clothing but is spotted with oozing sores . . tend to chatter idiotically) to Sharkardians (can fly via rows of smallish leather wings that shouldn't be big enough to carry them but can head is all jaws) to Dishrags (wrap and slowly crush victims often with psychic/metaphysical/quantum continuum disruption)

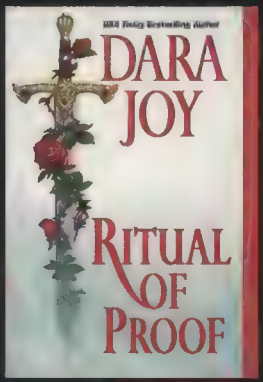
We commence watching this invasion from the point of view of the inhabitants of a high rise apartment building in San Francisco (actually the idea of living in a high-rise apartment building in San Francisco is enough to give yours truly the shudders all by itself!) and though we observe it more and more knowingly as the story progresses, we are essentially in the position of *Twilight Zone* outside observers who are relatively ignorant and really have no real idea what is hitting them

But that does not mean the horrors of the ravaging are not fully described nor that any torture or battering is concealed from the reader! And it isn't just the gore and pain that are shown; indeed they shrink and wither in comparison with the great heaps of indignities and humiliations with which the demons accompany them

Here is a marvelous example of how it works from one of the earlier pages. We watched as a terrified woman on the neighboring balcony—Mrs. Gurevitz, I think her name was—tried to flee back inside. The demon pulled her close and typical of the smashers simply began her to sit and engaged her in conversation for a while, telling her unctuously that it saw in her mind that she hated her bullying husband but was afraid to leave him because of the money problem, because she had no skills, and why didn't she have skills—because she was basically a mistake perpetuated by her mother in a careless

Islandia *is an underground classic of utopian fiction and a great place to explore the multitudinous possibilities of fantasy.*

All Who Enter Leave Preconceptions Behind



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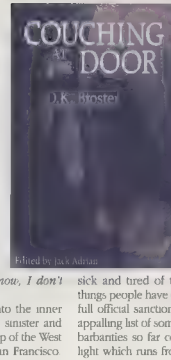
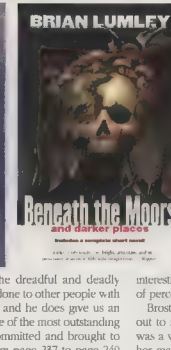
moment, not a real person who could develop skills, not like her sister, who was a lawyer—there was someone real.

Now that, I am sure you will agree, is truly devilish!

The second book, *Undercurrent*, starts nine years after the first and in this one we are led behind the scenes and shown deeper secrets and the awful possibility is revealed to us that the demons, horrible as they are, may not be our worst enemies. It, too, starts with a quote worth pasting into your hat, and from no less a personage than Edgar Allan Poe: *I believe that Demons take advantage of the night to mislead us—Although, you know, I don't believe in them*





This time we are allowed into the inner sanctums, the first one being a sinister and secret place built into the very top of the West Wind Building in downtown San Francisco. We visit it alongside Stephen Isquerat, first in a strange dream and then in the flesh (I mention this aspect because thereafter he is usually encountered as a hologram), where we find ourselves in the exalted company of no less than Dale Winderson, the CEO of the vast corporate entity of West Wind.

Winderson has hired Isquerat and placed him among the company's top management at the request of Stephen's father (whom he apparently owed) who is now dead of a raging cancer, and the executive has mysteriously tolerated all kinds of unbureaucratic behavior on the young man's part including Stephen's being the only one of his highly placed advisers who has dared to point out that a carefully patented and widely used substance called Immaculene—one of West Wind's most profitable products—is loathsome to the touch.

Now it turns out, as their interview progresses, that Winderson is not only unruffled by Stephen's latest negative reaction to a highly promising new product under development—a remarkably efficient pesticide named Dirvane 17—he wants him to go to Ash Valley, California, where the said Dirvane 17 is presently undergoing extensive testing and join those participating in the action.

I think this would be a good time to stop giving away any further clues as to what will happen next so that you can enjoy the shocking revelations as much as I did. Be assured that the crew testing Dirvane 17 is as pretty a pack of villains as you could hope to meet (outside of those presently featured in today's headlines) and that the demons we have met before are very much involved.

Do be warned, however, that this is not only a thoroughly entertaining fantasy adventure. It is also—though Shirley, except for a moment here and there, skillfully avoids allowing it to become a tract—a book written by a profoundly angry author who is clearly sick and tired of the dreadful and deadly things people have done to other people with full official sanction and he does give us an appalling list of some of the most outstanding barbarities so far committed and brought to light which runs from page 237 to page 240 in small type. I imagine that you will be, as I was, familiar with a quantity of them and sadly surprised to discover that there are so many others.

On the lighter side, he has some very amusing notions regarding the potentially nasty psychic implications of the Supreme Court's ruling (which still proudly stands) that corporations are to be considered as being as real as human beings and to have the same rights and privileges as living and breathing creatures do.

I'm so glad to learn there's someone else who thinks that notion is completely nutty!

It's a marvelous read and it just might make you hesitate the next time you consider doing something mean to someone and that'll do wonders for you.

D.K. Broster's horrific short story "Couching at the Door" has been put in enough anthologies through the years to make it possible for the determined searcher to locate that grim little gem with just a little heroic effort, but the book it originally eponymously appeared in, *Couching at the Door*, is one of the most evasive legendary books there is in dark fantasy, very likely thanks to the inability of anyone to forget the short story it's named after once they've read it.

Now the dauntless and ever resourceful anthologist Jack Adrian has edited a book once again called ***Couching at the Door*** (Ash-Tree Press, Ashcroft, BC, hardcover, 217 pp., $43.00). This book not only includes everything in that original volume but generously gathers in three out of four of the fantasy tales from Broster's previous—and also stubbornly unattainable—*A Fire of Driftwood* (he excludes the one missing just because he didn't like it but—considering everything—I forgive him); tosses in a fine little tale about the drawbacks of combining viewing cave paintings of ancient furry beasties with time travel which he came across in the Broster family papers and suspects is a first draft that has never been previously published; includes two nonfantasy tales (one from *Couching* one from *Driftwood*) which he, I think rightly, considers far too satisfactorily shocking and haunting to be left behind and—oh, yes!—there's a little poem at the end about a woman sipping blood from the head of a man freshly guillotined.

On top of all this Adrian gives us one of his pleasantly informative introductions that not only gives us all kinds of interesting news about the author but all kinds of perceptive insights into her writings.

Broster was a she for a starter (D.K. turns out to stand for Dorothy Kathleen) and she was a very astute businessperson who made her main income and her fortune, not from writing deeply disturbing little gems of fantasy which forever after drive multitudes of collectors to hunt compulsively through endless bookstores in a feckless attempt to locate them (up until now, that is), but from turning out large numbers of historical romances which, if Adrian is to be believed (and one certainly has every reason to believe him), are quite good.

In any case, be that as it may, the stories in *Couching* are all good and the best of them are truly marvelous.

The first one, "Clairvoyance," is perhaps the most flat-out appalling of the lot and is also a clear and subtle piece of sociology. One of Broster's major talents is her ability to observe societal subtleties and then integrate them magnificently into her stories so that they are very much part of the driving force along with the ghosties and ghoulies. This one's about spoiled darlings, those lucky ones of us who are so very fortunate that they can have pretty much whatever they want whenever they want it. It also points out that this endlessly continuing good fortune empowers them to casually wander much farther off the path than is possible for ordinary people. They have an easy ability to acquire rare and dangerous objects, for instance, or to live in surroundings so ostentatiously secure that the notion that the pit yawns as deeply beneath their feet as it does for all mortals becomes concealed from them and makes them sometimes arrogant and careless. A very instructive little fable all around and I bet you find yourself actually wincing back from the final pages in horror as you read them. "Couching at the Door" itself still gives me the willies even though I've long since lost count of how many times I've read it. Again, it's a story of the dangers of smugness, this time about celebrity and the remarkable powers it really does confer and the amazingly numbing distance it can

put between the celebrated and those kind enough to celebrate them if copious draughts of simple humility are not regularly taken by those receiving the celebration. It's also one of the most ruthless and satisfying accounts of just retribution ever penned. A beauty.

"The Pestenng" has all the ancient nastiness of one of Montague Rhodes James's better ghost stories, which is, of course, high praise indeed. The spectral visitation in it gets subtly worse by stages, being first irritating, then disturbing, then increasingly nasty until it crosses into being downright horrifying. And—very M.R. James, this!—the explanation of how the ghost came to be one is creepier and more haunting than the ghost itself.

The two nonfantasy tales are put at the end in a special section (the editor is obviously fully aware how cranky a ghost story reader can be if he is told he is reading a ghost story and finds out at the end he was not!) and Adnan says he feels that one of them is arguably her most chilling tale. I would differ only in quibbling that it is as chilling as any in the lot.

This collection has been eagerly anticipated for some years now and it has most decidedly turned out to be well worth the wait.

Once again Tor Books has brought out a collection of Brian Lumley's short fiction that would otherwise continue to suffer the indignity of moldering away in defunct magazines and out-of-print books from obscure publishers and jolly good for them, says I!

Beneath the Moors and Darker Places (Tor Books, NYC: hardcover, 384 pp., $24.95) is a fine, rip-roaring collection of unabashed and highly entertaining tales. I enjoyed coming across a good many I'd never read before and re-enjoyed a goodly bunch I'd read in the past.

Among this latter lot is "Beneath the Moors" which is actually a short novel that originally appeared on its own as a small volume from dear old Arkham House back in the days when August Derleth, who created that astoundingly influential institution, was still alive and kicking (and Derleth could kick a good kick!) and running the joint. That seems a long time ago for the very good reason that it was!

I usually avoid referring to personal history in this column but—out of pride and just because I feel like it—I'd like to mention that "Beneath the Moors" has a very special place for me since the last time I saw Lumley (who is, by the way, one of the most lovable of men) we were parting at an airport after spending a few days as guests of some convention. He very kindly confided to me that a review I did on that book in another publication on another world in a whole other universe than the one presently afoot was a great help and encouragement to him as he was, at the time, serving in his country's military police and was by no means the hugely popular author he richly deserves to have come to be. Learning that I had managed to help someone so deserving at such a crucial junc-

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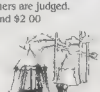


ture made me very happy and I must say it continues to make me very happy.

I am delighted to report that *Beneath the Moors* is still an excellent book, even though it is now nestled within another book. Of course now one realizes that in many ways its techniques presage the approach Lumley has employed in his enormously successful series such as *Necroscope*, but back then I remember what impressed me the most about the novel—outside of its being quite uniquely entertaining fiction with a really nice newedge and energy to it coming from his obviously enjoying enormously what he was doing—was that he'd very skillfully managed to blend the scholarly Lovecraftian mythos slow revelation approach with the careful assembling of actual documentary evidence method that Bram Stoker so very cleverly used in his *Dracula*.

The sense that the author is thoroughly enjoying his work pervades every story in *Beneath the Moors and Darker Places* beginning with the nicely nasty cautionary tale starting the book called "David's Worm" which, in the darkest sense reminds us that we are what we eat.

I found "The Sun, the Sea and the Silent Scream" to be a particularly fine example of Lumley's skill at literally making the reader's skin crawl. Also I don't know if the Greek Tourist Board or Authority or whatever knows that this story exists but I think they would be well advised to approach Lumley with a very handsome sum to withdraw it from any further publication as I would not be in the slightest surprised to learn that already a sizeable number of families have reconsidered a tour of that country's legendary islands. And there's another trip gone wrong recounted in "The Second Wish" that warns you off Hungary as a vacation spot (vampires!) and, in passing, offers a nice little tribute to R.E. Howard's poet Justin Geoffrey.

Maybe you should just stay home and cuddle up with a good book such as this one.

Islandia (by Austin Tappan Wright, Overlook Press, Woodstock, NY, trade paperback, 1,024 pp., $21.95) is one of those books I feel I should mention just in case there's someone around who might never hear of its being available if I don't.

I read *Islandia* long, long ago one summer and it pretty much took me the summer as it is a very big book and is absolutely packed full of stuff to chew over. The puff on its back cover is absolutely true, it really is an underground classic of utopian fiction.

It is also one of the few books that would actually deserve the puff that has been mistakenly put on so many other fantasies, namely that it can be compared fairly to what Tolkien wrought as it is the result of an author's extraordinary obsession with a fantasy land and is developed with the same obsessed eye to detail and depth of structure that make Tolkien's work so absorbing and engulfing. Do be warned, however, that, unlike Tolkien, sex and its subtleties and complexities are an enormously important aspect of *Islandia*.

I have no idea what I'd think of it now—I freely confess I did not reread its many pages for the purposes of this review (though I did reread the Introduction and Afterword and they are excellent)—but I know the book impressed me enormously that summer.

And I suspect that if you're really serious about understanding the possibilities of fantasy, *Islandia* may well be a place that can't be left unexplored.

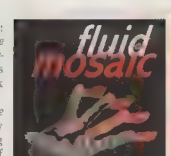
Gahan Wilson

Haussmann, or The Distinction, Paul LaFarge; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, NY, hardcover; 382 pp.; $24.00

What are the distinguishing marks of a fairy tale, those essential narrative elements by which we recognize a fable? Are they such superficial items as castles, witches, and dragons? Or are other, less tangible qualities more important? What about romance (in all senses of the word); a sense of wonder and otherworldliness; exotic persons with great destinies, odd happenings and fateful synchronicities? Are not all these latter things more crucial to the reader's sense that the story he or she is enjoying is taking place on a plane different from that which "everyday life" occupies? I'd argue that many good books which appear on first blush to be "realistic" are instead fantastic, and that many bad books overstuffed with literal fantasy are pedestrian and mundane.

Among those fine books that creatively straddle the borderline between realism and fabulism, I'd list the Oriental tales of Ernest Bramah, John Crowley's *Little Big* (1981), Mark Helprin's *Winter's Tale* (1973), William

Goldman's *The Princess Bride* (1983); Nicholas Christopher's *A Trip to the Stars* (2000); and China Miéville's *Perdido Street Station* (2000). To this honor roll you can also add the work of Paul LaFarge.



LaFarge's stunning first book, *The Artist of the Missing* (1999), was easy to spot as this kind of hybrid, dealing as it did with a mysterious city out of time and the weird happenings therein. His newest book, *Haussmann*, masquerades as straight historical fiction. But you and I will not be deluded by this pretense. Between these covers is nothing but pure fairy tale, even if the setting is the "real" Paris between the years 1840 and 1869, and even if certain "real" historical figures play their part.

The Paris of the book's beginning still retains much of its medieval ambience, with crooked narrow streets and rivers that function as open-air sewers. Into one such filthy stream is dropped an abandoned infant girl. Rescued by the lonely lamplighter Jacob, the foundling is given a home amidst poverty, and named Madeleine. Raised in a primitive fashion, Madeleine is eventually sent to live in a convent, where she meets an ailing fellow resident just a little older than herself. Nasène hails from minor nobility, and manages to fill Madeleine's head with dreams that Madeleine too, is an exiled princess. Infused with such dreams, Madeleine will lead an astonishing life even richer, yet more sorrowful, than she could have imagined. She will become the adopted daughter of a rich man with a curious profession: de Fonce, the demolition man, a strange fellow who never removes his rose-colored spectacles. And, most importantly, Madeleine will cross paths with the title character, Baron Georges-Eugène Haussmann, who is busy remolding Paris to suit his dreams. The on-again, off-again love affair between Madeleine and the Baron forms the heart of this book, with many side excursions into political scandals, comic misadventures, and social climbing.

Atop all this rich material, LaFarge adds another layer. He presents this book as a novel written in 1922 by a Frenchman, one Paul Poissel. Establishing Poissel's character and history with a short essay, LaFarge goes on to deeply portray the apocryphal writer by means of authorial asides, aphorisms, and observations inserted directly into the story. And an excellent character depiction it is, with a picture of the moody, whimsical, romantic Poissel emerging brilliantly, yet without detriment to the captivating story of Madeleine and Haussmann's love.

There are indeed slight supernatural elements in this novel: ghosts and odd maladies, speaking cats and a polar entrance to the Hollow Earth, not to mention a saintly statue that helps unwed mothers. But the dreamy ambience that LaFarge distills over even the most quotidian scene is the real magic performed herein. He makes us regard the everyday lives of his characters—and consequently, our own as well—as imbued with levels of meaning beyond mere words. As LaFarge (or Poissel) observes, to live in a story is to feel that one is always at the center of events. Anyone lucky enough to read *Haussmann* will come away feeling that it is possible to be the hero of one's own life, in the radical sense that Joseph Campbell defined heroism.

Coup de Grace and Other Stories, Jack Vance; Vance Integral Editions, CA, hardcover, 256 pp., $27.00.

Grand Master Jack Vance has no peer among living fantasists. Author of over 60 books, he is the living heir to such writers as E.R. Eddison, Clark Ashton Smith, George MacDonald, James Branch Cabell, and Lord Dunsany. Having established his distinct style almost from his first story publication ("The World Thinker" in 1945), he continues at age 86 to provide wonderful new novels, with the most recent being *Ports of Call* in 1998. Winner of many awards, Vance has built a loyal following of readers over the decades, both in the USA and abroad.

And yet, despite these sterling accomplishments, most of Vance's works are out of print, available only as tattered paperbacks and battered hardcovers, some heavily edited to their detriment. But this sad situation is soon to change for the better. An enterprise calling itself Vance Integral Editions is about to publish a uniform edition of all of Vance's work, including manuscripts never before seen by the public. Their first offering is a sampler, not part of the full set, and it's a real winner, showing exquisite care, craft, and intelligence.

This book contains seven stories, all illustrating an aspect of Vance's talents (although not even this volume can accommodate all of Vance's modes and manners): "Alfred's Ark" is a wry contemporary parable about faith and doubt. "The Moon Moth" tells of murder and deceit on an insolent world where all faces are concealed. Magnus Ridolph, investigator of the odd, solves a strange death in the title story. "Flutic" and "The Murthe" are snippets from Vance's famous *Dying Earth* cycle, the former starring Cugel the Clever put to work in a dirty job, while the latter features Rhialto the Marvelous battling a female spirit from the 17th Aeon. "Dodkin's Job" rivals the work of William Tenn in its satirical jabs taken at an over-regulated world. And finally, the incomparable "Green Magic"—which captivated me utterly some 35 years ago with visions of dimensions beyond words, and still does today—tells of the striving and disillusionment of an unwise magician.

Vance's immaculately polished language is remarkable for also being transparent to action and emotions. Nothing is obscure, everything is alluring in his stories, and the whole is wrapped in colorful fabrics of elaborately woven prose. Vance is a crafty plotter, and often employs tricks of the mystery genre to carry his tales of other worlds and other dimensions. (He has in fact written several contemporary mysteries, which will be part of the reprint series.) If you value one-of-a-kind fantasy stories, you'll want to take part in this exciting enterprise. Visit www.vanceintegral.com to learn more.

Fluid Mosaic, Michael Arnzen, Wildside Press, PA, trade, 121 pp; $13.95.

These 13 horrific stories cover a gamut of styles and concerns, yet are united by Arnzen's basic approach. He tends to focus on everyday people subject to unnatural stresses and strains, following them to their unfortunate, macabre ends. No one escapes alive from Arnzen's universe of terror (if a protagonist does, as in "Falling Back," he or she is left shattered), and the victims usually manage to bring others down in their wake. This consistency is both a virtue and a flaw, since it makes all the stories assume a certain uniformity of tone. Yet every creator deserves to speak in his or her own unique voice, and Arnzen indisputably hews steadfastly to his vision.

Certain stories, such as the opening "Immaterial Girl," possess an old-fashioned construction and ambience, while others—"My Wound Still Weeps" and "Sight to the Blind"—display a more surreal attitude. A story like "Cheese," in which a hapless billboard guy finds himself part of his own signage, exhibits a certain intentional gruesome humor. "Stigmata," the tale of a sun-dazzled woman who undergoes a bizarre mutation, strikes within shouting distance of Kathe Koja's work. And the title story might serve as a companion piece to Norman Spinrad's famous "Carcinoma Angels." My favorite is "In Fur," which finds an artist's model undergoing a harsh transformation under the hands of a mad photographer. This kind of gleeful Poe-esque perversity is like the famous Monty Python candybox sweet chocolate wrapped around a crunchy frog.

Paul Di Filippo

By Helen Pilinovsky

Donkeyskin, Deerskin, Allerleirauh: The Reality of the Fairy Tale

Fairy tales are stories based on issues that affect everyday life—hate and love, poverty and wealth, ugliness and beauty, hardship and happiness—disguised by a thin veneer of metaphor and magic that removes them from the immediate world, making them universal in time as applicable today as they were when the phrase "fairy tale" was first coined. The term "fairy tale" has in recent times become a euphemism for a certain frame of reality that contains at least some element of magic, in this case the achievement of results unattainable through normal means. Thanks to the changes in the old tales made first by Victorian editors and then by modern filmmakers, fairy-tale endings are now associated with situations in which everything, however improbably, goes right—a condition that can only be attained completely through magic, as reality is somewhat less obliging. That quality of perfection, however, is not representative of the fairy-tale genre as a whole, for the unbowdlerized tales possess examples of behavior which, when read literally, are all too real: abandonment, incest, abuse. The original purpose of folk stories was not only to entertain but to teach: to show listeners that they were not alone, to communicate societal attitudes toward topics deemed unspeakable in open society, and to present possible solutions through the metaphor of magic. One tale that has done just that for countless generations is known to folklorists as Aarne-Thompson tale type 510B (*The Types of the Folktale*, Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, 1964), also known as "Donkeyskin," "Tatter-Coats," or "Allerleirauh," to name only a few of the many versions of this all but universal tale. The fundamental story is the same in each case.

The transition from human to bird or animal form is a common theme in folklore, portrayed in Metamorphoses *by Terri Windling*

It begins with a dying queen, a king who is described as being the most powerful monarch in the world, and their daughter. In the queen's final conversation with her spouse, she extracts a promise that should he wed again, he will marry no woman who does not fulfill some particular conditions—beauty, shoe size, hair color, etc. It is apparent that this archetypal queen most emphatically does not want to be replaced, and chooses instead to set an impossible condition before her husband, passive aggressive, but not directly ill intentioned.

The king remains single for a number of years, unable to meet the conditions of his promise to his wife, until their only daughter matures. It becomes apparent that she alone fulfills the necessary conditions, and he resolves to marry her, to the horror of kingdom and princess alike. Seeking to evade her fate, the princess follows her mother's example by attempting to set an impossible condition to prevent the impending union. Typically, she asks her father for a dress as shining as the sun, a dress as lucent as the moon, and a coat made from the skin of either a single precious animal, or from skins representative of all the animals in the woods. The father is so driven by his incestuous urges that impossible condition after impossible condition is met. As folklore scholar D.L. Ashliman has pointed out, "The fact that the father can easily acquire these dresses patterned after celestial bodies must lead her to believe

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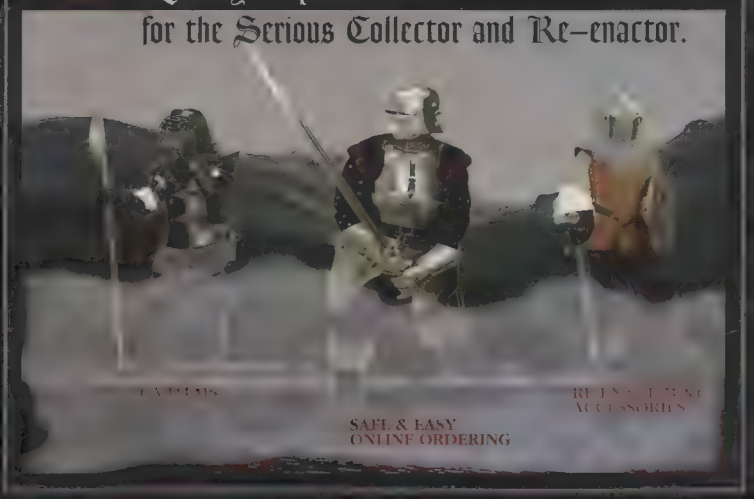

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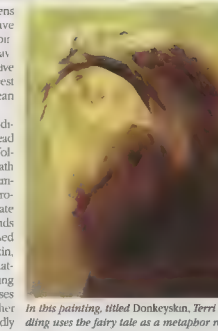
that the heavens themselves have joined in a conspiracy against her, leaving her no alternative but to flee" ("Incest in Indo-European Folktales," 1997)

When her conditions are met, instead of choosing to follow her father's path and acquiesce to immorality, our heroine takes her fate into her own hands and flees, disguised by her coat of skin, her link to the natural world, carrying the precious dresses that represent her heritage and worldly position. Her only advantage in her new environment is the cloak of skins she has finagled away from her father. The implications of this garment are interesting. First, there is the fact that it was created, whole-cloth, from the harm her father wished to do her and the manner in which she avoided that fate, a product of courage and cunning. Its substance, coming either from a creature magical in itself, or procured through magical means (as a skin consisting of the fur of a thousand creatures or received upon the advice of a fairy godmother can safely be assumed to be), dictates that this cloak is more than simply a source of warmth or a method of camouflage. It is also a resource that allows her to tap into a deeper part of nature and thus succeed in her future attempts at happiness through craft and cunning, where her past attempts have failed.

After a time spent wandering the forest, a place symbolic of change and transformation, the princess is discovered by a hunting party and taken to a foreign court on the strength of her value as a curiosity. Following a time of hard labor in the court kitchens, the princess develops a strategy. She determines to catch the interest of this kingdom's prince through traditionally feminine gifts (as Maria Tartar points out in *The Classic Fairy Tales* 1999), her physical appearance, her cooking skills, and her ability to maintain his continued interest and fascination. This threefold plan succeeds, and the story concludes with the prince's declaration that although he knows not who she is, she will be his dear bride, and they will never be parted from one another again, for so long as they both shall live (Joanna Cole, *Best-Loved Folktales of the World*, 1983)

Although the princess in each version of tale type 510B does face the possibility of sexual abuse, she is portrayed as being able to avoid it through a combination of unlikely luck (that a father willing to force an incestuous marriage on his own daughter would wait until the wedding night to offer a threat) and unrealistic accomplishments (walking the space of a kingdom in a single day, being discovered and supported by kindly citizens, finding that the kingdom to which she has run belongs to a man worthy of her love, etc.) While this story does send a positive message to its audience that abuse is not in any way the fault of the victim—it has a number of problematic qualities that can be attributed largely to the taboo nature of the subject matter in the societies that produced the tales. Ironically, in the period when this tale was first published in the form best known today (Charles Perrault's "Donkeyskin," 1694), this was probably as much information as young people were likely to receive on the subject of sexual predation.



In this painting, titled Donkeyskin, *Terri Windling uses the fairy tale as a metaphor representing a woman with a brutal past who is cloaked in silence and shame.*

One way modern authors try to achieve the goal of using fairy tales for their original purpose of teaching through example is by reworking familiar subject matter in a more realistic mold. Authors Robin McKinley, Jane Yolen, and Terri Windling demonstrate the effectiveness of this approach in their modern interpretations of tale type 510B in their works *Deerskin*, "Allerleirauh," and "Donkeyskin," respectively. They focus on the reality of a number of topics that had been brushed over in previous versions, even those that most closely approached the taboo issues. Let us examine their work, going from the most overtly fantastic to the most reflectively realistic, to see how the messages they convey compare with the older versions.

Robin McKinley's novel *Deerskin* is no less magical than the folk tales from which it's drawn, but it is far more realistic in its message. With more space to work with, she adds a number of details not present in the older, shorter versions. In folk versions, there is no mention made of any wrongdoing up until the king's "proposal" of marriage. McKinley's depiction of the parent-child dynamic in an abusive relationship is far more true to life. First, there is an implication that the queen, the mother, was abused as a child. As well, there are intimations of problems in the parent-child relationship even before the mother's death. On the surface, the princess of this version, Lissla Lissar, respects her par-

ents. However, that respect is not based on actual contact with them, but on tales she has heard all her childhood that present her parents as glorious figures, larger than life—"the most beautiful woman in seven kingdoms," and "the most powerful king in seven kingdoms." In reality, absorbed wholly in their own images, their neglect is a form of abuse in and of itself. Upon her mother's death, Lissar's illusions are shattered. Her parents are no immortal figures of legend, but are as mortal as others and thus can be judged by similar standards. It is at this point that she cautiously begins to emerge from her isolation, and to consider what she, as an individual, and not as the daughter of her parents or as a princess of the realm, might be capable of in her own right.

The obsessively grieving king, cast out from his fairy tale existence by the death of his wife, notes the resemblance between spouse and offspring, and announces his intention to wed his daughter, using the justification that has been used by myriad tyrants that the subject of attention somehow belongs to them and is theirs to do with as they will. The reaction of his court presents an interesting insight into the nature of society. The court dismisses the king's guilt and their complicity by blaming Lissar for her father's actions. Their words are ugly, and bear a certain resemblance to our culture's tendency to blame the victim. They say, "[H]e still misses his wife … he has not remarried. That is probably the girl's doing … She probably has a hundred little petting luring ways when they're alone together… "

Unlike the princess of the original story, Lissar is not given a grace period until her wedding night, her father rapes her shortly after making his announcement. This brutal act forces her to flee, despite the timidity she had only begun to overcome. Like the princess of the original version, Lissar grows stronger away from her poisonous home. In the forest, symbol of growth and change, Lissar encounters the opportunity to be self sufficient, away from the judgment of others. However, there are limits to even the greatest feats of endurance, and finally, Lissar reaches the last of her resources in the course of a miscarriage resulting from her father's rape.

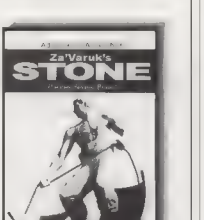
It is at this point that the magical aspect of this story begins to become clear, when Lissar is aided by a deity, the Moonwoman, who personifies the archetype of the experience she has suffered. This figure, roughly analogous to the fairy godmother of older tales, renders unto Lissar a number of gifts, among them the deerskin dress from which McKinley's novel takes its title. The deerskin is white, symbolic of purity. It is impervious to stain, abrasion, or other forms of damage. It is not too much of an intuitive leap to say that in some way it is meant to represent Lissar herself. Lissar continues to mature, going through many of the same experiences as her fictional predecessors, finding her way to another kingdom, working, and encountering a man whose affections she can return—in this case Ossin, the most unroyal prince of the foreign kingdom. Ossin does not love her for anything she may represent—a dead wife, or a form of salvation, he does not love her for her beauty, or her cooking. He knows her for *herself* and says, "I believe that you are as human as I, and I'm glad of that." Ossin is not the sort to create the fairy-tale illusion that drove her mother, her father, and her country insane.

There is one last, crucial difference between the older tales and McKinley's version. Where the princess of the old tales abdicates her independence and responsibility to her spouse, this princess cannot do so. Where the first princess merely "told her prince[her past history, and all that had happened to her, reassuring him that she was, as he thought, a King's daughter … and they lived happily till their deaths," such a simple ending is impossible in McKinley's more realistic story of abuse. Though Lissar loves him too, she believes that her experiences have rendered her somehow unfit for love. The sad reality is that this sensation of being harmed beyond healing or repair is part of the cycle of abuse, continuing long after the physical scars fade. Again, Lissar flees, not from any new physical harm, but from that which she cannot escape, that which lies within her. She returns to the forest, to the cycle of healing that had previously been broken by her miscarriage.

This time, the cycle is also marked by bloodshed, but not her own. Her dogs are attacked by a wild animal in the woods, reminiscent of the attack of her father. Lissar's attention is torn from the past to the present, a change in mind set that eventually helps her to develop a certain peace of mind, a distance from her memories, described as the ability to "[remember] the softness and sweet smell of the nightgowns she used to wear when her favorite bed time story was the one of how her father courted the most beautiful woman in seven kingdoms, and the night gown was still a pleasant memory, and she could spare the knowledge of sorrow for what was to come to that little girl without spoiling the understanding of that earlier innocence and trust." When she heals enough to make that connection, she no longer needs the ameliorative tool the wood provides, and it fades away, leaving her to finish the healing process for herself. This she does by continuing the cycle further, heading toward the city—not to change her mind, but to rectify any undeserved pain she may have caused her would-be suitor.

The last part of this intensive, immediate healing process, which, in its entirety is likely to continue far beyond the close of the novel, comes when Lissar is granted the opportunity to confront her father, to accept the truth that what was done to her was just that—done *to* her—and not a thing for which she was responsible. This is coupled with the realization that even after Ossin learns the entirety

Za'Varuk's Stone
BY ADAM LEE D'AMATO-NEFF



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of what she has suffered, he loves her still What he says to her is completely antithetical to the words expressed by the prince in "Thousand Furs," who says, "You shall be my dear bride, and we will never be parted again, although I know not who you are." Instead, Ossin tells Lissar, "I love you, and I do not believe there is anything so wrong with you

I was there this morning … when you showed the scars you bear, and accept that you bear them, and will always bear them " Even in the face of this declaration, Lissar does not fall prey to the image of her reality Instead of promising to "live happily ever after till their death," Lissar is honest, and warns that she will try to stay with Ossin "for as long as the length of their lives . . but [she] did not know how strong [she] was … [and she] could not promise." Ossin tells her, "It is enough For who could make such promises?" This conversation is wholly realistic, and markedly unromantic in the "fairy tale" sense of undying love, portraying an unusually honest picture of what true love really is McKinley's ending is happy, but that is not to say that it presents the idealized "happy ending" of the older tales. She knows that the past cannot be ignored, but dealt with over the course of the years, for better or worse

The next tale, written by Jane Yolen, deals with the other side of the coin, with consequences worse rather than better. Yolen has published over 70 works dealing with fairy tales. "Allerleirauh" is one of the shorter works, but also one of the most haunting. In this tale, written for a collection of fairy tale fiction dealing with child abuse, Yolen examines the idea that abuse seldom consists of a single type, or of a single incident or encounter. As she has said in a discussion of this tale, "While I wanted this to have a happy ending, the story insisted otherwise "

"Allerleirauh" begins in the traditional fashion, with the dying queen and the grief-stricken king. Here, however, the queen dies in childbirth, and the promise concerning remarriage is not exacted by the queen, but offered voluntarily by the king This is a very interesting variation, removing, as it does, any onus of guilt from the easily scapegoated female figure. In the original folk tales, the queen is typically a rather thinly written character. While malignant motivations are not unthinkable from a mother to a child, as other fairy tales prove (the original "Hansel and Gretel," for example, before the Grimms lessened the shock of the careless mother by removing the blood-bond and making the abandoning mother a "wicked stepmother"), in the case of tale type 510B, we find no standard maternal indicating any such intent Thus, the fact that the promises concerning remarriage are *offered* by the king in Yolen's version serves to pare it away to its most essential qualities, as is necessary in such a brief reworking of the tale. Yolen leaves her readers with no room for ambiguity; she makes her interpretation of the tale painfully clear She writes: "He had made two promises to the blanched figure that lay on the rude bed … 'Promise me.' Her voice had stumbled between [her] lips, once red, now white … 'Promise me that you will love the child,' she said, for even in her dying she knew his mind, knew his heart, knew his dark soul

'And promise me that you will not marry again, lest she be …' and her voice trembled, sighed, died."

Using the logic of older tales, and of mothers, one can assume that the queen intended to ask her husband not to remarry, lest his new wife be cruel to this child of a dead wife Using the logic of a lover, however, and the logic of a "dark soul," he chooses to finish her sentence, not with parental concern, but with a final, if backhanded, compliment, he swears not to replace her unless it is with a woman who is her physical double, implying that her worth is purely physical He finishes his wife's sentence, saying he will not remarry "Lest she be as beautiful as thee … 'Lest she have thy heart, thy mind, thy breasts, thy eyes …' and his rota continued long past her life." Brought out of his reverie by the thin wail of his newborn child, reminded anew of the presence that cost him his wife, "he ran from the cottage screaming 'I shall go mad!'" Though he manages to rule, his words prove true, his madness manifests in his behavior toward his child, whom he refers to privately as "Undoing," though her given name is Allerleirauh Translated from the German, this name can be read as Thousand Coarse or Thousand Fur Yolen removes the aspect of the story concerning the flight of the princess and her cloak of furs, so one assumes that the first meaning is the intended one, serving to show the father's distaste for his daughter

The king's peculiarity is noted at first by two people, and two alone· his daughter and her nurse Yolen writes, "Only two in the kingdom felt the brunt of his neglect. Allerleirauh, of course, who would have loved to please him, but she scarcely knew him And her Nanny, who had been her mother's Nanny …Where Allerleirauh knew hunger, the nurse knew hate She blamed the king as he blamed the child for the young queen's death, and she swore in her dark way to bring sorrow to him and his line " The nurse plays a fascinating role As in the older stories, she is a surrogate mother figure; however, unlike the archetypal fairy godmother, or McKinley's Moonwoman, her goal is not to help, but to harm. The nurse sees the king as deserving punishment for his role in the death of the queen; she achieves her goal by using his desire for a surrogate bride against him. As the king sees his daughter as an extension of her mother, so the nurse sees the princess as a living extension of her father. Thus, in illustration of the wisdom of being careful what you wish for, the king is presented with his desire, and his doom. On the occasion of a great ball, intended to bring the king a suitable spouse, the nurse says to her charge· "I will make you three dresses … the first dress will be as gold as the sun, the second as silver as the moon, and the third one will shine like the stars " The nurse "hoped that in this way, the princess would stand out. She hoped in this way to ruin the king " Yolen does not specify what form she hopes that ruin might take. Her nurse might hope that the king will froth at the mouth, rage at the sight of the healthy child whose life cost him his lover's life, prove himself unfit for his office. Or, she might hope for the events that follow, which will by any moral standard ruin the king

Yolen does not say, and we are left to wonder Yolen's tone is musing as she pens the conclusion of the piece: "Now if this were truly a fairy tale (and what story today with a king and a queen … is not?) the princess would go outside to her mother's grave .. The neighboring kingdom would harbor her, the neighboring prince would marry her, her father would be brought to his senses, and the moment of complete happiness would be the moment of the story's end . . But this is not a fairy tale. The princess is married to her father and, having always wanted his love, does not question the manner of it Except at night, late at night.. "

Yolen explains how the affair, despite its horror, is permitted to continue, how "[t]he marriage is sanctioned and made pure by the priests," how one priest who dissents "is murdered in his sleep" and another is "burned at the stake." As she puts it, "Silence becomes the conspiracy; silence becomes the conspirators." This line is particularly poignant, showing how the act of abuse is not only the action of a single sick man, but also the unspoken consensus of a society feeling that the sacrifice of one for the continued good of the many is somehow an acceptable loss. We learn, in the last lines, that "Like her mother, the princess is weak wombed She dies in childbirth. .. The child she bears is a girl, as lovely as her mother." The "her" in this case is ambiguous, Yolen could be referring to the queen, who birthed the unfortunate princess molested and dying on the verge of adolescence; she could be referring to the princess herself In either case, "The king knows that he will not have to wait another thirteen years It is an old story. Perhaps the oldest." And thus we conclude this chapter of the oldest of tales . . with the unspoken certainty that it will be repeated, again and again. The nurse achieves her vengeance against the king The king is granted his desire for a bride And what of the princess? The "satisfaction" of the adults in this tale come at the unthinkable cost of the innocence, and life, of at least one child, if not more The child is treated as a symbol, discounted as a being, in a painfully insightful tale of what it is in society at large, and in the individual human spirit, that makes such abuse possible· the tendency toward personal safety even at the cost of willful blindness to what is wrong

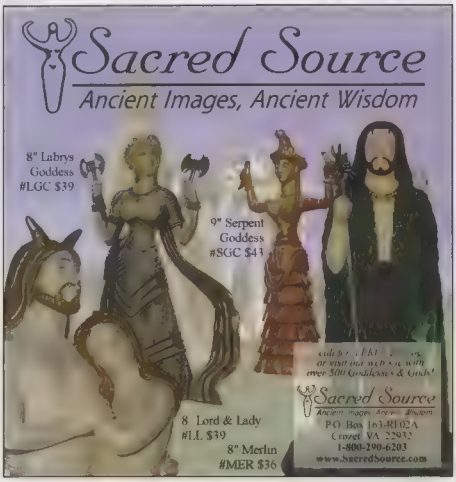
Terri Windling deals with this difficult issue as well. The driving force behind the insight

ful collection of tales entitled *The Armless Maiden*, in which authors such as Anne Sexton, Tanith Lee, and, as previously discussed, Jane Yolen deal with the harsh matters that lie at the core of such fairy tales as "Sleeping Beauty," "Snow White," and "Donkeyskin." Windling herself deals with the issues of the Donkeyskin tale, and with the relevance of fairy tales in confronting the problems of modern life, in two pieces: the prose-poem "Donkeyskin" and in the essay "Surviving Childhood." Windling addresses the issues of the survival of self in the face of abuse, and the responsibilities of society, as well as the relevance of fairy tales in dealing with them.

In her "Donkeyskin," Windling takes an updated text allusive to Perrault's version of tale type 510B, and inserts the experiences of a modern child in a similar situation to that of the heroine of the older tale. The functions of the tale follow the order of memory, rather than chronological positioning, strengthening the poignancy of the tale. Each verse begins with a header, taken either from the fairy-tale text, or from the text of the headlines, the phrase, "Once Upon a Time" is juxtaposed with the unfortunately equally familiar opening of "Have You Seen This Child?" found on milk cartons and bus station posters. The combinations serve as a painful reminder of just how common the themes of this fairy tale can be. Her tale begins in a familiar fashion: "Once upon a time there was a fortunate King . . . his wife was as lovely as she was good, and gave him a daughter just as lovely." But one day, the Queen fell ill, and knew that she was dying. She called the King to her bedside and said: 'My dear, you must make me a promise. You must promise that you will not marry unless you find a wife who is better than me.' For she worried about her young daughter, and tales of stepmothers evil and cruel." As it turns out, as in all other versions of this tale, the queen would have done better to be concerned with the behavior from her husband's quarter. Similarly to the king of Yolen's story, Windling's king's interpretation of his wife's intentions is explicitly quite different from what she had in mind. She had meant a wife who would be better for their daughter, for her family, he took her meaning more selfishly, and thought in terms of the wife who would be better for him, who would be most lovely and desirable.

Windling writes that the king "was bound by his promise—and there was no maid to be found better than the Queen, unless it was their own daughter . . . he saw that she was lovely indeed . . . [and] he was mad with desire."

The use of the word "mad," which surfaces in these three modern tales as well as in many of the older versions, is quite interesting, some critics feel that the motif of madness is used to distance the motivations of abusers from their actions, removing the responsibility from their shoulders, and making it clear that such actions are outside the bounds of



human behavior. For example, Perrault makes it clear that his king has lost his senses during the period when he attempts to wed his daughter. He regains them by the conclusion of the story, and in fact attends her wedding. Windling, however, allows no illusion that the father's madness is unique, or justifiable, as in McKinley's tale. the daughter is shown to have suffered actual abuse and not, as in the older tales, merely the threat of it. Windling writes that some time after she fled "The bruise on her face faded to yellow and she [walked] without limping." The explanation for her limp—a beating, a rape—is left to the discretion of the observer.

Further on in her tale, the abuse of the father is shown to be possible in other elements of society. The men who frequent the truck stop diner in which the daughter takes refuge are drawn as possible parallels to her father. In one situation, a man is condemned through his own words, saying, "That girl at the counter, sixteen if she's a day, mebbe younger. Lookit how she struts her little ass—you know exactly what she's looking for, and I've a mind to give it to her." The words of the latter individual are reminiscent both of the abuse of the father and of the attitudes of society exhibited in McKinley's story as well that, somehow, the victims have drawn their situations upon themselves. In the majority of the older tales, however, and in the majority of the modern ones as well—Yolen's version being a particular, pointed exception detailing the worst case scenario—the denouement of the tales indicates a framing societal agreement that such attitudes are biased, unfair, wrong. In Windling's version, the words of the abusive customer are silently rebutted by the inner thoughts of another trucker, thinking that the girl behind the counter is similar to his younger sister. He thinks "A girl that age out on her own, she was probably running away from trouble, she wasn't out here looking for it. He wishes Joe would leave the poor kid alone." Yet, like the cowed citizens of Yolen's tale, he offers no overt disagreement. Windling makes it quite clear that the problem here is not in the singular case of her heroine's father, it is a societal epidemic caused by the twinned factors of sexual predation and the inaction of those who are not personally affected.

In the diner, Maria notices a billboard with its notices of goods bought and sold, men wanted and women and children misplaced." This sentence sets the atmosphere quite firmly in place; in a society where one out of four girls, and one out of nine boys, according to recent statistics, is abused, her tale is unfortunately commonplace. Windling underscores this point by enclosing within her tale a sadly familiar paragraph, she writes, "HAVE YOU SEEN THIS CHILD? Donna Maria Alvarez. Fifteen years old. Brown hair, brown eyes, 5'2" tall. Last seen February 15th in Boise, Idaho. Have you seen this child? Her family is very concerned about her whereabouts. If you have any information, please call the National Hotline for Missing and Exploited Children: 800-572-9054. All information confidential." Such plaintive statements echo in the modern collective unconscious, echoing the sentiments of the trucker, we feel it likely that the subjects of these inquiries have fled either from trouble, or into trouble. Windling's heroine is lucky; in the last paragraph, as the girl flees her situation, she finds herself "on a long, straight road where a sign said WELCOME TO NEW MEXICO. THE LAND OF ENCHANTMENT in bold black script. The past stretched out behind her. The future stretched out before her. And she knew which way she had to go." Windling's heroine survives, and perseveres, by dint of her wits and strength of will; whether the same can be said for the countless other children in such situations, either in the past or the present, is unknown. We do know that their chances for healing depend in part upon the examples that are set for them—both individually and societally.

The examples offered in the genre of the fairy tale have been said to serve a therapeutic psychological function. Psychologist Bruno Bettleheim, author of *The Uses of Enchantment* felt that "the fairy tale is a verification of the inner life of a child." Windling's brilliant essay, "Surviving Childhood,"

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The Princess (Catherine Deneuve) wears a "dress as lucent as the moon," and her fairy godmother (Delphine Seyrig) whispers in her ear in Jacques Demy's Peau d'Ane (Donkey Skin)

expands upon that idea through the medium of personal experience, providing readers with an undeniable argument for the relevance of fairy tales to life in the modern world. After referring to Bettleheim's statement, Windling says, "I needed that verification I needed to know about stepmothers so cruel they would order a child's heart cut out and boiled and salted and served for dinner. I needed to know about the heroine who climbed seven mountains and wore out seven pairs of iron shoes before she found her true love. I needed to know that fairy godmothers sometimes come in unlikely disguises, or that a fair face could hide a black and wicked heart. I needed to know that with honor and steadfastness and pluck I could survive." Windling concludes with a statement that can be held almost as an inversion of Perrault's closing maxim from his version of "Donkeyskin." "The tale of Donkeyskin is hard to believe," he wrote, "but as long as there are children, mothers, and grandmothers in the world the memory of it will not die. His tale was aimed at those who have need of warnings, and those who, terribly, have the experience to provide them. In much the same tone, but with a key difference, Windling says, "These are stories for the Hansels and Gretels still imprisoned in the witch's cottage. And for the lucky ones, the brave ones, who have found their way out of that terrible wood." Windling, too, dedicates her tale to those who have suffered—but, importantly, does not doubt the truth of her words. These similarities are a sign that, while we have come far, there is still a while to go before we, collectively, are out of the woods.

The older stories, with their myriad permutations, and the modern tales that we have examined in this column all share more than their subject matter. They are told not merely from the desire to entertain but from the conscious longing to help, to warn, to heal, and to inform of the potential for happiness that lies beyond. Ashliman has stated that "many fairy tales owe their longevity to an ability to address tabooed subjects in a symbolic manner." Today, it is no longer as difficult, as frowned upon, to discuss matters of sexuality and abuse directly, yet, the symbols of story still serve as bridges to the deeper truths that cannot be easily articulated. The idea of danger from trusted sources, unfortunately, is as real today as it was a hundred years ago, or a thousand. So, too, is the attraction of the idea of the armor of the second skin. The concept of wanting to be recognized for the true self within rather than the camouflage of that armor, or the artifice of the cosmetic, that, too, is true. The most eternal factor of all, perhaps, is that of inherent strength, individual courage, personal perseverance; we hope, and we know, that even if we as a people should ever manage to grow beyond the need for the former, the latter will always be integral to our natures. The stories shift, the details evolve, the characters change their names; but the fundamental nature of the stories, and our need for them, will remain the same. ❧

For further reading, consult the books mentioned herein, also The SurLaLune Fairy Tale Page (members.aol.com/surlalune/frytales_index.html), and D.L. Ashliman's Web site for folktales dealing with incest (www.pitt.edu/~dash/incest.html). A full, uncut version of this essay can be found on the Endicott Studio for Mythic Arts Web site (www.endicott-studio.com)

L. RON HUBBARD
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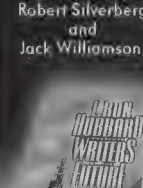

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BOULDER

Sometimes where you end up is far,
far away from where you were going.
And where you were going is often not
where you were meant to be.

Janet Reno—

Come away, come away

BY STEVE PORTER — ILLUSTRATION BY ALLEN DOMONEY

COUNTRY

"The conference will last over the weekend," her secretary, a dour young man that seems not to have a smile in him, tells her. Sometimes Janet notices he is pretty to look at. Not this time

"You're speaking on Sunday afternoon," he continues. "Nothing is scheduled for Monday Will you be in?"

In? She has an impulse to cry out like a crow: *The judge is IN!* The sudden thought makes her smile. For a moment, she sees herself as she imagines her secretary sees her: a tall, big-boned, angular woman with features more suited to hard, German Lutherans than to the plain New England Puritans surrounding her A set mouth below short, utilitarian hair. Her suit is made of good, honest wool and her hands have the look of fence mending or oak carpentry or pulling weeds Mechanic's work, she thinks. The law is also mechanic's work Determining tolerances. Measuring guilt. Her shoulders feel suddenly heavy. She wishes she were doing something else, somewhere else

"I'll be back Sunday night I want to go over the week's briefs on Monday afternoon With you and Brendan." Thinks of Brendan a large, round Irishman of a prosecutor. She suspects him of donating most of his pay to the Irish Republican Army. He has no other life

Driving north on the Southeast Expressway, over the Neponset River, past the Boston Gas tanks—

—famous because they were painted by Conta during the Vietnam War and because a trick of pigment suggested the profile of Ho Chi Minh. It was unintentional according to Corita, as accidental and whimsical as the profile of a man in rock, the Old Man of the Mountain, in New Hampshire. (See? See? There it is! What face? No eyes, nor mouth—but see him there As real in my mind as my Grandmother's face, who died years ago and lives in no other place.)—

—into the traffic chaos of downtown Boston. Speaking at the Marriott

The conference is on tort law and personal liability There are questions from her colleagues. Compliments. She finds the response depressing for reasons she cannot explain to herself Still, the speech is well received and she is glad of that. The *Law Review* will probably carry it and the *Boston Globe* reporter tells her it should get a page four write-up; good press if she were looking for office Which, perhaps unfortunately, she is not. She wonders if she does any good as a judge Perhaps she should seek different legal work—prosecution, maybe. She wonders if she could get an appointment as the U.S. Attorney for Massachusetts. It would be simpler, she thinks, to have the choice of sides already decided. Most of the prosecutors she knew slept well at night, secure in their opinion that they were doing the right thing She smiles wryly to herself. If she were not keeping herself awake at night examining the fine entrails of the law, no doubt she would be keeping herself awake in some other way Out side, on the warm and sunny waterfront, she breathes in the smell of salt, gasoline and rotting harbor. She resolves it is too early to return home

Janet Reno drives out to rent a canoe, a habit she acquired at college in Michigan—

—not Cornell University; nor later Harvard. In this narrative, she has never seen either campus Here she has been raised in the great Willa Cather Midwest: North Dakota, where the dominant November color is gray and Florida is a place seen on television and dreamed about in the cold vault of the winter—

—so that occasionally, she takes to the water Not to paddle furiously, but to float and stare blankly into space, the flight of birds, the play of sun and sky, ripple across the surface of her mind. Often, she seems to awaken not exactly knowing where or what or who she is. Her name is lost Then, like returning from a foreign country or waking from a pleasant and familiar dream, these things come back to her.

Since moving to Quincy and becoming a state judge, she has not had the time to indulge this predilection regularly but only when she is brought to Boston in the course of her work. Still, over the years, the canoe rental office personnel have come to know her, come to observe her stern features, set as any other stone, sitting still in the canoe and gradually softening into contemplation.

On the water, she usually goes downstream—

—past the Waltham watch plant Royal Robbins took the failing company in the late 19th century and with the monomaniacal application of his single talent (to make a penny scream) brought it back into profitability Where engineers competed with one another, spun off companies, shaved microns of gold off of flywheels, feverishly divided the particles of a second into finer and finer shards of mechanical accuracy—

—into the lilies and duckweed. But today, impulsively, she wants instead to go upstream, against the sluggish current. It is the day's weather, she tells herself. Or a desire for relaxation after a morning full of mouthing words. She needs the feeling of effort in her bones, a stretching of the muscles, a curling and uncurling of the spine And this day is unique· The afternoon warmth has broken all records. People are wandering on the streets and sidewalks in a daze Canoes bump one another in the water and the collisions are ignored as their occupants hold out their hands, palms up, faces up, to catch the light like supplicants

She paddles upstream in a bright green canoe—

—a shape, not an object Only the original shape has been retained over time. The sleek, silvered, birch bark canoe of two hundred years ago looks and feels similarly to one constructed today of plastic or aluminum Both were created out of the same need The hand touching the paddle and the paddle itself are shaped together in a connection as fluid and supple as the river itself—

—feeling her back grow warm. The frozen suet in her muscles, left there she is certain as the cumulative detritus of long, lonesome winters, melts into a buttery strength The canoe surges forward upstream in the water so that she is conscious of sky and water and movement and forgets as unimportant (this is what she can never remember) her locale, her profession, and her name

She comes to herself near the foot of a dam beneath a road It is, she thinks, the old mill dam at Washington Street. She remembers herself, now, the conference and her speech. She should go home If she returns to her car by four, she can be home to her house in Quincy by dark Janet dislikes driving in the dark.

As she sits in the shadow of the dam, she looks at the light, her paddle across her knees, feels her ankles warm and wet from the splash The sun still seems quite high and she has no desire to return just yet She decides to portage upstream and continue above the dam.

She stands with the canoe on the edge of the road. There are no shops or buildings of any kind. The road, empty of traffic, flat and cracked, bends around the ridge of a hill, crosses over the river and turns around another ridge to disappear. It confuses her. She wonders exactly where she is, since she thought Wellesley was filled with people. Below her, on the banks of the river, are the plastic bottles, beer cans, and paper wrappers of civilization. Clearly, there must be another dam between Washington Street and the rental center that she has forgotten. This heartens her, since it indicates she has not traveled as far as she thought. The sun is high, after all.

Her muscles loosened, paddling is comfortable to her now. Now, while she paddles, she is fully conscious of her surroundings There are a few ruined buildings along the river, broken and caved-in houses and once, the burnt out pilings of what appeared to be an old dance hall. Janet is uneasy.

Some time later (the sun seems not to have moved at all) the current increases until she is straining against it, using some old instinct of reading water to find the calm eddies and make the work easier. Soon after, she reaches the foot of a waterfall That's it, she thinks to herself I'm on the wrong track here There is no waterfall between the dam and the rental agency.

She ties the canoe to a half-submerged willow and stands on shore admiring the waterfall. It is a strong surge over two large boulders The fall begins 20 feet high or more above and spills over a drop of

at least 10 feet to explode against the broad boulders at the base. Its roar is too loud to speak against, had she any intention of speaking or company with which to speak. For some time, she watches rainbows in the spray, smells the mist, tastes the water that hangs cold and gelid in the air.

It is time to go home. Janet Reno turns to take the canoe down stream, kneels fully erect, holding the paddle out at the proper angle—

—return is always more knowable than escape. The value of this is up to the traveler but the state is inescapable. Thus a person that *returns* is a person intending to come to a place already known, or at least conceived, while a person that *escapes* is leaving that which is known in favor of the new or different. Both of these terms imply that one's current location is known in a deep and abiding way. Else, why return? Why escape?

—and is struck blind.

Light is still seen. The shore is near. The water moves around her; she is not paddling. But the significance of things is lost. The concept of movement in any direction cannot be understood. Janet is too lost to even be afraid, there is no perspective on what has been lost. She cannot even remember a direction much less summon the will to pursue it.

Only when the canoe's adrift spins to point upstream does her mind seem to catch on that as a direction. She sits in the canoe, shaking. Expertly, she turns the canoe downstream again, prepares to paddle and is again lost. It is as if the world is written on her gaze in a foreign language. She can see the letters and words and sentences of the landscape but cannot make sense of them. The current turns her again and things again fall into place. She feels a terrifying loss of control, as if she has just become incontinent or struck deaf or knocked down senseless by a blow.

Perhaps it is epilepsy, she thinks desperately. Or a basic unwillingness to return to her life, a deep upwelling of resentment she had suppressed until it has now found expression. Or is she just stiff and tired? She tentatively paddles upstream and experiences no difficulty. She lets the canoe drift and each time the canoe turns downstream, her orientation is lost. She tries drifting backward, pointing the canoe upstream, but gradually the disorientation creeps up within her like nausea until she can't stand it anymore and begins to paddle back upstream. One last time she turns the canoe downstream with the same horrifying result. She is free only to travel upstream. She returns to the base of the falls.

The disorientation is not painful—

—reminds her of Brendan's story regarding when he was being treated for a knee injury. The orthopedist asked, tell me if this hurts or if it just feels wrong. Brendan laughed as he told her. "I had no idea what he was talking about. But he pressed the side of my knee in this funny way and I almost hit him to make him stop." Brendan shook his head, rolls of him shaking like the swells of the ocean. "I hated it. It would have been better if it had been excruciating"—

—but no less terrifying. It is something beyond her ability to face.

She ties off the canoe and stands, stretches, and tries to relax her body. She climbs up the bank and looks around. It is a broad field of Indian grass without any human sign.

In the distance, she sees coming toward her a violent, swirling cloud. It resolves itself into a collection of birds. Starlings, crows, sparrows, swallows, terns, sea gulls, intermingling flocks of thousands of birds, come over her and circle, fly over her, do loops and figure-eights, songs mingling in an unintelligible roar.

Their freedom enrages her and she shouts at them. "Where am I? What's happening to me?" There is no response. "God damn you." She starts sobbing and hates herself for it; she hasn't cried twice since she was a little girl.

The birds fly magnificently above her, ignoring her as if she were a stone or part of the river. As they swoop over her, over the Indian grass and the river, other birds join them, as if the flock were a free-floating magnet, drawing up like kind to like.

She grows hoarse shouting at them. Crying out at them. She picks up rocks and sticks and throws them into the heart of the birds but hits none. They finally turn as one and fly irregularly, erratically, from one side of the river to the other, upstream, leaving her, the canoe and the waterfall alone—

—at night, in dreams: across a figurative landscape consisting of

> Dreams are always of the past, some past, somewhere. Of what else could they be made?

the stones and branches of past discoveries, walking along the beach, blind, fingers scrabbling for mere measurement of past events. Dreams are always of the past, some past, somewhere. Of what else could they be made? Yet there is in this country of the mind a thin line between the imagining of the past and the creation of the future. An elephant walks through the desert. The great boulders overlook the lake. The mountain twists broken-backed into the sky over all. At night. In dreams—

It is the smell of cigarette smoke that wakes her. She sees an unfamiliar black face looking at her, shrieks, and sits up. The canoe (didn't she sleep under the canoe?) lies on its side next to her.

There are several of them. Strong, hard men. At first, the texture and color of their skin blends into some intermediate tone so that they all seem of one shape and hue, head and hands. After a moment, she sees them for what they are and their color ranges from pitch black to the color of milk chocolate. Two of them have hideous tattoos on their face and arms, the patterns linked together in swirls and waves. She thinks they may be Maoris but she is not sure. Some of the others are darker, but their faces are more regular, more like her own. One tall, attenuated man is so black his skin has a bluish tinge. They are like the raw ore of skin color, mingled together but unmixed. She cannot identify the different human strains reflected in their color. All she knows is that they are different from one another. She is appalled at her own ignorance. They appear more or less her own age.

"How'd you get here?" asks the one in front of her. His English is accented as if he had attempted but had not quite succeeded at becoming British.

Her stubborn temper, never very far from her, flares. "Who wants to know? Who the hell are you?"

He laughs. "Jack Herrington, if you please. I'm from Sydney."

"Who are your friends?"

He nods to the darker skinned men. "Sam, Pommey, Weedy—my neighbors. Bill Feather, the tall drink of water over there, is from Zululand. Those two are from South America, I think, but they haven't spoken. The short two're from New Guinea, maybe, according to Sam. The rest might be from anywhere that has a language I don't know. You are?"

"Janet. Janet Reno. From Boston."

"How'd you get here, Janet Reno?" Jack asks amiably.

She explains, suddenly, desperately, and without reserve. Only one night in the open, she thinks contemptuously of herself, and she's confiding in perfect strangers.

Jack nods. "We were asleep in our beds. Woke up yonder." He

points vaguely behind him with his chin. "We been walking west ever since."

"Why west?" she asks, groping for a concept in direction in this directionless land. "Which direction is west?"

Jack doesn't answer and shrugs instead.

One of Jack's companions says something in a different language. Jack answers. There is a quick heated debate. Jack is clearly responding negatively to some kind of proposition. Jack's opponent sings a quick song, apparently, to back up his point. Jack responds angrily. The men with tattoos are impassive and quiet.

"Well," Jack says to her at last. "We'll help you get the canoe over the falls at least, eh? Then, we'll be off."

"What?" she asks incredulously. "You're going to leave me here? Let me come with you. I can help."

Jack shakes his head. "Can't."

"Why not? Look—"

"We're looking for our own people, Janet Reno. Not you. You haven't seen them nor trace of them." He shakes his head again.

She's babbling now. "I can help you. We shouldn't be alone. We should stick together. . ." She trails off. It is the walled faces of men standing behind Jack that stop her. She composes herself. "At least, tell me where I am."

"Don't know myself, Janet Reno. The bottom's fallen out of the world." He chuckles again, picks up the bow of the canoe and hands it to the others. They carry it above the falls, then hold it between them as if it were a religious vessel. Each of them reverently places in it something of value from their stores: bits of string, a piece of meat, some candles, a knife.

With that, they walk away and disappear into the tall grass. She cries out after them. "*Wait!*" but they are gone and she cannot even hear them. She runs up the bank and looks down. The Indian grass sways for a moment, showing where they entered. After a moment, that too is still and she can see only Indian grass for miles—

—unmarked by the taller, more virulent Pampas grass around Boston, where there, and elsewhere across America, Indian grass is fighting for its life. Pampas grass, an Argentine invasion, is winning by virtue of being taller, quicker growing, and completely inedible. This should come as no surprise since these were the very reasons for which it was imported. Huge, sterile swamps are being created beneath our noses. Indian grass whispers when the wind blows. Pampas grass knocks together like two-by-fours—

There are koi in the river, gold and white and orange. Her ability to be surprised has been dulled and as she glides over them, she watches them hungrily. On impulse, she drops a piece of meat over board. The result is instant and dramatic. Three small koi break the surface, fighting over it, are pushed aside by larger koi and then the lot of them are forced whole above the water by even larger koi beneath. She reaches down and grabs one of them by the gill and hauls 10 pounds of gaily-colored carp to the bottom of the boat. The fish barely fights. Only an occasional shudder and the reflexive opening of the gills show it is suffocating.

Janet slits the fish from chin to anus with Jack Herrington's knife and pulls out the guts, trying not to think about what she is doing. The part that makes her want to cry is the bare admission to herself that she doesn't know when, or if, she'll get home. If she does not look for food, there is the implication that she is being looked for, that she'll be found before she starves to death. To look for food, to hunt food, declares that no one may be looking for her after all.

It is evening when she cooks the fish by the side of the river. She eats until she is full. The carp seems a dull, unconscious thing and she gets no satisfaction from the meal. She wonders what is happening in Quincy or Boston, if anyone has missed her, if she is being looked for. She wonders where she is. There is no moon in the clear night. Neither are there airplanes. Without the fire, there would be only starlight.

She sets the head of the fish on a rock across the fire. She stares at it, trying to will it to say something. At least, she would have conversation. Nothing happens.

"We have ways of making you talk . ." she says sarcastically. She shakes her head and stares into the fire. Then, glances back at the fish. The fish seems to be watching her.

"Talk to me. Where did you come from? There aren't any koi in the Charles River."

Nothing.

Janet adopts a wheedling tone. "Come on. What have you got to *lose*? There's nothing left of you but your head—talk to me!"

Nothing.

"I can do things for you," she says sweetly. "Things you might like. I'm not as old as I look."

Nothing.

In a choking fit of rage and madness, she kicks the head high in the air. As it arcs toward the water, it cries out in a long drawn out wail. "*Waaa!*"—

—tumbling through the sunlit air (she remembers) off the cliff toward the water, sun, sky, water, sun, peace, and comfort as she drifts (falls) toward the water. She looks back as the water comes toward her slowly. Her brother on the rock, wet stick of a body only the bare legal minimum covered in oil-slick shorts, watching her laughing. She doesn't seem to strike the water so much as to roll into it. An explosion of pain and darkness from somewhere near where her head used to be. Breathing underwater (it was easy!), dancing free. Then, light and sickness, waking in the hospital bed only a skinny, bare memory of what happened eventually filled with hearsay and innuendo, the fall, the saving by her brother, her brother returning to the pond to look for her shoes, slipping and being himself found hours later—

—The head strikes the water grotesquely lit by the glare of the fire, floats for a moment, its jaws moving. Bubbles and grunts come from it. She almost jumps after it but something (skinny white body in oil-slick shorts) stops her and it sinks, tumbles away from her, lost in the black (night) water.

The next morning, she crawls out from under the canoe and wearily climbs up the river bluff. She stands there, looks down and around. She is still in a vast and windy plain of Indian grass, bending and straightening. Bending and straightening. In the far distance she can see tall, purple mountains, painted with snow, high, perhaps a mile higher than she is. If nothing else had told her she was far from home, this does. There are no mountains like that for a thousand miles in any direction from Massachusetts.

She sits down on the bluff. The grass is wet and she can feel it seeping through the cloth of her jeans. She doesn't care.

"I'd sell my soul to get home," she says softly, hopefully.

"Do tell," comes a voice from behind her.

He is a young black man, sitting on the front step of a tarpaper shack. His hue of skin she knows. He shows the dilute skin color of mixed ancestry. He laughs at her expression, claps his hands. "I do enjoy that look. I must confess."

Janet stares at him, shakes her head, looks again. Neither shack nor man was there a moment before. "Where did you come from?"

"That, honey," he chuckles again. "That is *not* the right question. The *right* question is where did *you* come from."

"Boston," she says instantly. "And if you can get me back there—"

"Boston," he says. "*Boston*. Did you know I've *never* been to Boston?" He shrugs. "Of course, I never *wanted* to, but that's not important."

"Can you take me home?" She half rises to her feet.

"No, I can't," he says simply.

"Oh." She eases back onto the ground despondently.

Silence falls between them.

"Do you *want* to know where I'm from?" he asks.

She shrugs.

"Since you insisted." He stretches, cracks his knuckles, sings in a splayed out, rhythmic voice:

I shot a man in prison up in New York State though
that can't be my home. It was just my fate. See,
I was born way down in Waco, in the Texas state
Who am I? I'm the master of my fate. Like
Destiny's hand, I'm the man called Nate
The rest of the tale I've spent as a roamer
Though I didn't plan it I turned into a loner
I blew out of prison like magic from a potion
The story of my journey is like the crossing of an ocean
I went up into the mountains they were dark like wine—"

"You're a singer," Janet interrupted.

"She's quick. I'll give her that. Yeah, I am. There's more." He points to himself with his thumb. "Nate Davidian. You heard my album, maybe?" He holds up his hand and moves it in the air as if spelling a title. "'Nate: The Story of Odd-Man.' Short. Succinct. Strong."

"No."

"Yeah." He shrugs. "Well, it hasn't been produced yet. But it's just a matter of time. I've been playing all the clubs and my agent's got a couple of tapes out. Soon, maybe I'll get a call eventually."

"A call?"

She stands up. "A phone!" She runs inside the shack and runs through the two rooms. No phone. She comes back outside. "You don't have a phone."

"Like I said, you are quick." He puts the palms of his hands together. "I'll get a *call* when the moment is *ripe*. I don't need a phone."

"I don't understand." She sits down on the steps. Her head is as heavy as death. She buries her face in her hands. "I just don't understand." A despondency as deep and dark as sleep enters her and she just rocks against the steps—

—remembers the river and the swamp, a long, blank expanse of reeds without even a current to mark the way. In the distance, a single mountain begins to rear up over the others, to rend apart the clutter of clouds on the horizon. But the distances are soft, the water has an oil slick sheen to it, and when she reaches out to grasp the stem of a reed it has the consistency of soft cheese—

"Wake up, lady," comes a soft, musical voice. She looks up at him.

She can smell coffee, eggs, and sausage. She is suddenly ravenous. Real food! The trip had to be a dream. She sits up.

The interior of the shack is composed of plywood scraps stapled to building paper, shingles, and asphalt siding. There are a couple stolen road signs nailed precariously to two-by four studs and in the corner a construction warning light blinks a mechanical, epileptic yellow. The smell of breakfast comes from an old and battered Coleman stove.

Nate is gently helping her stand up and bringing her to the table. He is clearly agitated. She doesn't care. It wasn't a dream. The world has still lost all sense.

After she has eaten, she feels better. "Thanks," she says.

"No problem. The least I could do is give you a decent breakfast." He chuckles. "You've slept the day away," he sings softly. "And now it's time to go."

"Go?" She holds the coffee cup tightly. "You can't make me go now. I won't."

"I not only can," he says, singing the words softly. "I *got* to." His voice resumes a speaking tone. "I took a nap a little while ago and when I woke up, I was still here."

She shakes her head uncomprehendingly.

"You aren't the only person on the go, now," he sings.

There're whole nations afoot, peoples on the move.
from the heart of Iran to you in a canoe,
they're all changing their lives, putting on a new face,
but I'm very different, I stay in one place,
and the world moves around."

"You understand?" asks Nate pleasantly.

Janet holds the coffee cup in her hand, leans her cheek against it. "Not the least bit."

"In *English*, you mean. Eh?" For a moment, he scowls. "In English. All of you people are moving around. Looking for some place. *Driven* to some place, maybe. And you walk on streets, say. Or hike through the bush. Or—" he waves his hand toward her "—canoe down a river. You are *going* to your place. It's waiting for you."

"You think so?" Janet leans forward eagerly. "You really think there's a point to all this?"

"Oh, yeah," Nate says easily.

"Where?"

"I got *no* idea," he says, just as easily. "But me, I'm different. I'm staying in one spot and *my* place is coming to *me*." He spreads his hands and looks upward when she stares back uncomprehendingly. "Think of it this way. You are driving a car down the road and all the trees and stores and houses are streaming past. One way to look at it, the way most people look at it, you and the car are moving down the road and the trees, stores, and houses are still. The other way to look at it, the way *I* look at it, the car is stock-still and the trees, stores, and houses are moving past. You are holding me to one place."

He stands up and walks outside. She follows. They are still on the bluff looking at the Indian grass.

"And that's why *you* got to leave."

"I don't understand."

"Even when you're asleep, you are holding the world *still*." He spreads his arms and turns. "It's all in *motion*. It *flows*. All around me. Every time I look, it's a different place that drifted by."

"Where am I going?" she cries out.

He steps behind her, touches the corner of her eye—

—touches the lid of the horse's eye. It closes. She slips easily onto the saddle. There is a stretched moment when it looks at her, disbelievingly. A complete mystery how she had gotten on its back. She barely has time to set herself when the horse begins to—

—whirls and behind her the shack is gone. There is not even a broken place in the grass where it had been. The only footprints on the ground are her own. Below her is her canoe. It is morning. Dully, she climbs down the bluff and gets in the canoe and pushes off. Once she is away from shore, paddling upstream, she realizes her hands are hurting from being clenched so tightly to the paddle. It is at that moment she realizes how furious she is at Nate. Were he to appear before her, she would batter him into unconsciousness with a blunt object and not stop until his skull was a bloody, steaming pulp.

Over the next few days the land changes to swamp. Swamp grass to paddle through, swamp thick with flies, swamp clogged with black mud. The current disappears and often she must get out of the canoe and drag it over the mud. In the distance, the mountains are closer. She stares at them. Sits down, giving up all semblance of knowledge, all presumption of continuity.

When she leaves the swamp, the river, like the tide, has changed direction.

Downstream is now the direction of choice. She is no longer disoriented but there is no longer any choice; she cannot return the way she came. The water becomes quick, the rapids more treacherous, the bank of the river grows high and steep. She pays little attention to anything but the river. Downstream! She clings to the hope that it is taking her home against any evidence to the contrary. But when the river widens again and the humps in the river become huge breaking waves, she forgets going home. She remembers only that she has to get off this river to survive.

The inside bend of the river holds a great, swirling eddy. The inter locking currents spin her canoe like a gear and shoot her into the calm center. She paddles to shore and pulls the canoe up high. Ties it off.

She can see now that the eddy is formed by a descending ledge.

It forms a natural bowl The downstream edge of the eddy and the rest of the river are cut by a razor-straight line. She walks around and climbs the ledge

It is a waterfall

Not the small one she remembered from the beginning of this endless trip, but a break in the edge of the world. It is hundreds of feet across and broken with boulders and debris. The roar of it deafens her. She sits and watches things fall out of the water and smash against the rocks: boats, logs, part of a house, a man's body. Invisible from the top of the falls, they appear out of the flow, show in the fall, then disappear in the white froth below.

Around the ledge and the falls is a red clay desert. The river has carved a shallow canyon down through it. Though the mountains are close and clearly covered with snow, the day is hot and the river obviously cold. fog appears at the base of the falls and fills the canyon.

It is night before she manages to get the canoe down the cliff to the base of the falls. As soon as the sun begins to set, the temperature drops. She builds a fire and sits next to it, watching a tiny moon proceed visibly across the sky, its phase moving sideways like the eyelid of a snake. Her body is hard now, toughened by the days (weeks? months?) of travel. Her mind no longer dwells on where she is or if she will be found. Its scope has been narrowed to what the next moment will bring: the behavior of fish she is trying to catch, the building of a fire, the nature of the river. The moon's silent passage through the sky catches her gaze and she watches it. Its clockwork movement seems a triumph of sorts and she feels like cheering. Warm tears fall across her chilled face.

For a long moment, she can remember her life before this endless journey as a whole, a complete picture, a frozen representation of her childhood, career, loves. Janet gets the sudden impression that this representation is a gift that she could refuse, that the entire memory of her life could be cast away if she so chose. She could find herself trembling and bereft of the past, her mind as naked as a frog. She could go forward without the burden of a past. She could be born again. Janet recoils from the prospect, holding on to her memories crying out: *mine*. The moment is past and she relaxes. Whatever should happen to her, she would remember who she is.

The fog on the river only lasts a short while and is followed by blazing sun and the water takes on a quick, flat character. The fish are plentiful. She has plenty of time to sit and watch or doze—

—remembers a robe of black wings, a desk the size of a mountain, papers falling over the edge like water. The room is filled with strangers. She lifts up a hammer and slams it down in a loud crack—

—wakes up and hears the breaking of wood. Downstream a log has caught on a rock, spun and been broken. It bends against the water and the remainder suddenly splits, bouncing in the air and catching on another rock. The water pillows up and pours between the two. Her path is blocked.

Furiously, she backpaddles, tries to pull out and around the logs. The current is too strong. The canoe is swept against one log. She leans out and grabs it, holding herself and the canoe in place. The canoe rises up and stays with her, vibrating. For a moment, she looks around wondering what to do.

The water spills over the rock and the log in a gurgling mess. She can feel the log shifting slowly.

She pushes off, turns the boat and it plunges down the drop into the water, rises up, fills with water. She pulls the boat (swamped but not tipped!) slowly to one side toward the eddy. Hears a groan.

Above her, she sees the log come loose, tip toward the drop, plunge in after her. The tip strikes the canoe where she is, cracking the end. She loses the paddle, grabs the thwart. The canoe drifts slowly sideways, strikes a downstream rock and folds around it. She falls out, is drawn under the boiling water—

—skinny body in oil slick shorts. He'd been a hell of a swimmer—

—pushes up from the bottom (spins) breaks water (breathes) pulled back under water—

—breathing water was the easy part. It was the long feeling of sickness and death that stayed with her for months—

—strikes the side of her face against sand, digs in with her fingers to stop spinning, looks underwater—

—remembers the light underwater. There had been (she thought in her haze) a whole dream country in that light—

—seeing nothing but foam, pushes up again, breaks the surface (breathe!), finds her footing, stumbles, grabs a rock, and holds on in a white-knuckled death grip.

Breathes.

For a long time that is all she does. The water is cold and eventually she realizes from a great distance that she is shaking. A warm pair of hands takes her by the shoulders and eases her from the rock, through a swirling current (grab onto those hands!) to the warm sand. She lies down on her side holding her knees. The hands pull away from her shoulders and a man sits down before her. When she can focus she can see who it is and she smiles.

It is, of course, Brendan.

It is not the Brendan she knew, 350 pounds of laughing Irishman. No, this Brendan has been outdoors for a long time. The fat is gone from him and his skin hangs on him in folds, around his knees, at his elbows, around his neck, as if it were brown, draped cloth. He is wearing an old pair of cutoff pants and the remains of a pair of wingtips.

Brendan sighs and it is a sound Janet remembers.

"I thought it would be you," he says in a windy singsong, as if he has not spoken for a long time.

"I can't say I'm surprised." She sits up. "Though for the life of me I couldn't tell you why. Did you come looking for me?"

Brendan shrugs. "Not exactly. Your canoe was found on the river." He nods toward the green canoe wrapped around the rock. "Just like

"It's a wheel within a wheel and we on the big wheel got no idea who is turning the little wheel or why it turns."

that. It floated down to the rental agency. The police looked for a while but never found your body."

She looks at her canoe, thinking of the same canoe, perhaps, floating in the river alone. It unexpectedly moves her. It's just a shape, she tells herself fiercely. Just a shape with a history.

"A few weeks after that, I went up to Newton for a meeting in a restaurant," Brendan continues. He looks at her guiltily. "It was an interview. Boston Gas was interested in me."

"Oh." Janet wonders how she should feel. Quincy seems so far away.

"You were dead," he says defensively. "At least, everybody thought so. Anyway, the restaurant was right next to the dam so I walked down to look at it. There were these six men there and one of them said I must be Janet Reno's friend."

"Jack Hemington." She lies back down and laughs. "That son-of-a bitch."

"Right," says Brendan sourly after her laughter has dried up to a chuckle. "He said I could follow them if I wanted to find you. So I left with them." He wipes his mouth and spits out some sand. "I didn't realize it would take this long."

"Where is Jack?" She finds she is eager to see him: to see anyone she's seen before.

Brendan shakes his head. "Oh, he left me to myself a couple of days after he found me. Said to follow the lake to the river and wait at the falls." He snorts. "It's a big goddamned lake, too. I walked around it for over a month until I stumbled on the town."

"Lake?"

"A lake feeds this river." He points over the hill. "Not very far. The river meanders around the southern edge."

She stands up. "A lake feeds this river? Not possible. I've been down the damned thing."

Brendan looks tired. "Look, I just know what I've seen. I followed the river down here from the lake this morning. It took some hours walking along the river. I might have made it faster but I was afraid of getting lost."

"I'm telling you—"

"*Don't* tell me, Janet." He stands up. "I've been coming down here every day for a year. Come on and see for yourself."

She follows him up the bluff to the trail and soon after they reach the edge of the canyon.

The country is populated with big, round boulders so that the land slopes down from them to the edge of the canyon on each side of the river. From here, she can see the water.

Janet feels a reluctance to leave the river. She won't answer Brendan's questions. Finally, she decides to go to the top of the ridge where Brendan says she can see the lake. Maybe there she can decide what to do.

Brendan falls easily into the role he'd played in Quincy, that of creative follower to her leadership. Janet finds she is uncomfortable with it.

As they walk up among the boulders, the mountains, hidden behind the ridge, begin to show themselves. At the top of the ridge, they look down on the lake. Tall, sharp, and blue, the mountains' escarpments and peaks cut into the sky. Janet leans against a boulder and looks at them—

—remembers the lake before the mountains, like a bowl of reflections, the great mountain opening the sky above them all, steaming and warm, the hot scratchy breath of the desert mixing with the wintergreen scent of the pines, remembers waking and looking out the window to see this place again and feeling sleepy, confused when there was no mountain, no desert, and no boulder country—

—looks at them and says: "I know this place." And feels the compulsion to come here fall away. She was not forced here, but drawn here. The orientation of the world changes, spins, does a sudden dance and centers here.

"Enlighten me," says Brendan dryly.

"Never mind. Look," she says pointing across the lake. "A town."

"I know. I live there." As they walk down the ridge toward it, Brendan says, "Today, the lake doesn't seem that big. Doesn't seem like it should have taken me a month to walk around it."

"It's big," she answers.

"Really? How do you know?"

—I've been here before—

She repeats it to herself. I've been here before.

"Never mind," she says aloud.

Later, in a bar, some months after.

She sits next to Jack and offers to buy him a beer.

"I'll take a beer from Judge Reno," he says.

"I don't like the title."

Jack shrugs. "Who cares? You have it anyway. You'd rather me call you by your other nickname? 'Old Stone-Face,' indeed."

"It wasn't my idea."

But the title, at least, has become true. In the intervening months, people have come to trust her opinions and she has become, again, a judge. This time, though, she finds she enjoys it. It is the sharpness of her mind, the soundness of her decisions that they respect. The force of law does not support the judgments she makes, there is no law here. With time uncertain and things being either too new or too old, what counts are force of mind and personality. More people are coming all the time in small trickles but there is still plenty of room for them and, now, plenty of room for conflicts. These are brought to Janet to resolve.

The growth is evident this morning. As she took her walk she saw evidence of humans swimming against the river: a man repairing shoes in front of a cart, a lively discussion on the methods and routes of climbing the mountain that looms over the town, and, most of all, a watchmaker opening his new shop. The new shack next to the watchmaker was Nate's but he wasn't home. In the last few months some buildings, like Nate's, had come intact, some with and some without inhabitants. There is talk that a couple of them might be thousands of years old. Janet is not so sure.

The beers come. He sips his, turns to her. "You want to ask me something?"

"How did you know Brendan knew me?" She sits on her chair.

"He had you written all over him."

"Come on."

Jack shrugs and doesn't answer.

"Do you have any idea what happened?"

Jack looks at her, his grizzled face sad. "I don't know, Janet Reno."

"You know something. Tell me."

"Tell me something, then," he says staring at her. "Why don't you go home?"

"It's too hard to paddle that far upstream."

He stares at her, unblinking. "That's a lie."

She can't look at him, sips her beer. "Tell me something, Jack. Anything you know."

Jack turns to his beer. "My neighbor, Pommey, knows more about the time before than I do."

"The time before?" she says to bring him out.

"You are not so ignorant, Janet Reno," he says reproachfully. "I mean the time before the time we have; the Dreamtime. He says we've returned to it."

Janet sips her beer. "What do you think?"

Jack shakes his head. "I think the world turns, sometimes. The invisible star by which we navigate changes places. When that happens, everybody damned well better scramble to find their places under it again. It's a wheel within a wheel and we on the big wheel got no idea who is turning the little wheel or why it turns. We only know that when it turns, we must turn with it."

"That's it?"

"It sure ain't the Australian government doing another 'native relocation.' I'm sure of that."

She draws her beer and leaves him and stands alone outside under the night sky. At home, in her little cottage, Brendan waits for her. The Indian grass whispers in the faint breeze and for a moment she feels the wondrous joy of someone who has escaped a great tragedy. The world turns under her and the moon passes over—

—in the dream, she remembers, it is the Great Warm Mountain—

—she begins to walk home—

—and she remembers climbing it, feeling its warm soft wetness, smelling pepper and ice cream, looking down at the town to the lake, the boulders and beyond them the falls and the river beyond all of them stretching away from her as far as she can see, the country glistening with snow, remembers someone singing, someone speaking and someone giving her gifts, in a boat, on a river, under the shining, snake-eyed moon. ❧

The Room of the Fiery Horse

Is it better to hobble in safety or to run scared? Ask a Fiery Horse woman. But ask her nicely.

for months, even years.

sought remained elusive.

By Hilary Moon Murphy • Illustration by Web Bryant

Then he found it. hot, almost peppery, with an underlying sweetness Tsi Sha closed his eyes and hissed with pleasure A female of the Fiery Horse, the rarest of flavors. Few of the girl children born in that year had lived past their first night Tsi Sha had found them abandoned on country hillsides and city rubbish heaps as families rid themselves of their inauspicious newborn daughters.

They had tasted delicious.

Eight-year-old Li Chi found taunting the Po brothers irresistible. They were fat, and mean, and her neighbors. She stuck her tongue out at them. "Slow, slow, slow. Do you two have feet or do you slide on snot like a snail?"

Po Ta, the quieter of the two, just bit his lip, but his older brother Po Fei turned bright red and shouted, "Chi, you have just died!"

Both brothers tore after her. Laughing, Chi careened through the crowded stalls of the market, her wild tangled hair blowing behind her. She sprinted past vegetable sellers who chanted the praises of their produce. The calling voices developed a hypnotic rhythm that carried her along.

Po Fei bounded behind her, covered in sweat, his little brother trailing far behind. Chi wove around an ox cart, under hanging cages of squawking pigeons, and then dashed at the last moment between the men bearing a lady's palanquin through the crowded jewelers' stalls. The startled bearers jerked to a stop, almost dropping the palanquin, which rocked from side to side. The woman within screamed. So did the bearers.

"Insolent girl!"

"Child of pest!"

Chi did not look back. The Po brothers were far behind her now. No one could catch her. Sweaty and out of breath, she loped around the edges of the market, dawdling for a while in the shadows of a doorway to watch a performing monkey.

It was only at the gate of her courtyard that she discovered how much trouble had found her. Li Chi stopped, dismayed. A heavy-set dowager sat with her mother in the garden. Both Po brothers stood nearby, with Po Fei looking especially angelic.

"The child is a menace," the dowager said, "racing everywhere. She startled my bearers, and nearly overturned my palan ..." The dowager stopped mid-sentence, eyes narrowing as she spotted Chi. "Girl! Come here."

Chi shook her head.

"Li Chi, come," her mother said. "This is Madame Ang."

Chi stepped forward reluctantly. Po Fei smirked as she walked past him.

Madame Ang pointed at Chi's feet, already large for her age. "Look at these. So big already. You cannot put off binding them anymore."

"No," Chi whispered.

"What did you say?"

"No. I want to run."

Madame Ang's smile did not reach her eyes. She lifted her silk robe to show off her own lily feet, each no longer than Chi's palm. "Girls with big feet do not bring honor to their families with a good match. Be sensible, child. You were born when—the year of the Snake? What need have Snakes of feet?"

"Snake?" Po Fei smirked. "She's a husband killing Fiery Horse. Who'd marry her?"

Chi clenched her fists. "Be quiet!"

Madame Ang's nostrils flared. "No wonder she is unmanageable. I would never have brought a Fiery Horse daughter into this world, but if I had, I would have raised her properly."

Chi's mother sat quietly, not meeting Madame Ang's eyes as she received this criticism. "You are right," she said. "We cannot put it off any longer."

Tsi Sha continued to track the elusive scent- oh yes, this one already had the spark. A pity she had not yet matured. Although some spirits were better when consumed young, Fiery Horses improved with age. Experience often mellowed them and gave them a depth and complexity that Tsi Sha found appealing.

Still, for all their strength, Horses could be fragile. Once broken, their spirits rarely rallied. Eat her now or wait? Tsi Sha would have to consider his options.

Chi stared morosely at her feet. Why had they kept growing? Hadn't they known when to stop? Would she ever again feel mud squelching under her soles? Would tomorrow be the last morning she could wiggle her toes?

She sneaked out while the cook prepared the family's evening rice. She wanted to remember every aspect of this run, the sweat on her skin, the pounding of her heart, and the pleasant soreness in her limbs. It did not take long for her legs to find their familiar rhythm, and she lost herself in the joy of it.

If only she could run and not come back. Perhaps she could go someplace far away where she could grow up with unbound feet and keep running forever. The daughters of foreign devils grew up like that; why not her?

Lost in her thoughts, Chi did not see the great white serpent slide across her path until he was almost on top of her. She skidded to a halt. Wider than she was tall, the snake formed a large scaly wall that even now coiled swiftly around her. She turned, but had nowhere to flee. Everywhere she saw white, the color of ghosts and death. Oily rainbows, like those found in puddles stirred with a grease stick, played across the surface of each shiny, white scale.

The serpent brought his great head level with hers and studied her. Chi told herself that the pounding of her heart and the tremor in her limbs had come only because of the run.

His golden eyes compelled her. In the right eye, she saw herself bobbing along on bound feet. In the left one, she saw herself as a tall young woman running up a mountain path. She drew so close to the left eye that she brushed the serpent's soft scales by accident.

Chi pulled away, shaking the visions from her head. "Who are you?"

I am Tsi Sha, the dream stalker. I slide into people's dreams, and I hunt them until they die.

"I'm not dreaming."

Just because your eyes are open does not mean that you are outside the dream. Where were you, a few minutes ago? You ran in my realm, Li Chi, dreaming of the lands beyond the Middle Kingdom.

Chi swallowed. "You're hunting me?"

Not yet. I offer you a choice. You can go to bed tonight and greet the foot binders on the morrow. You will live your life in misery and obedience and you will be safe. Then the serpent brushed his face against hers, running his tongue lightly along her forehead. *Or, you can run with unbound feet for seven years. Do you want to run, Li Chi?*

"More than anything," she whispered. "But I must know. What happens after the seven years?"

I eat you.

Chi's hands shook and she wiped the sweat from her brow. "Why? Why offer me a choice? Why wait?"

Your spirit shows much promise. It blazes bright but not yet fierce. I want you mature, strong, unbroken. You will be a meal to savor.

"I ... I need to think. May I walk for a while?"

You may. But I will go with you. The serpent uncoiled himself and slid along the path beside her. As she walked, Chi took deep breaths, trying to clear her head. She did not know what to say. The wise decision, the one her parents would want, would be to choose long life and obedience.

But seven years stretched far in the distance. So much could happen between now and then, and the foot binders would arrive tomorrow. What use did she have for a long life if she would have no joy living it? Trembling, she realized that she had already decided.

"I will run."

As you wish. As swiftly as he had come, the serpent had disappeared. Chi sank to her knees by the path. Tsi Sha had left behind a trail of crushed and broken underbrush. What sort of dream carved such weight?

In the middle of the broken plants, she found one shimmering white scale that slowly turned to gray in her hand. She turned it over and over before hurling it away.

"What have I done?"

Tsi Sha gave Master Li a dream of his ancestors, who requested that Li take a message to Peking immediately. Li went to saddle his horse, but found the animal's legs tied so tightly that it could not walk. When Li protested, the servants loaded the horse into a lady's palanquin, exclaiming how graceful the animal now looked. He tried to undo the bindings, but it was too late. The animal was ruined.

When Li awoke, the curses of his ancestors still rang in his ears. After he called for his daughter, he studied with dismay the small bowed figure before him. What respectable family would take his child in as a bride? One look at her would reveal the wild streak within the unruly hair that escaped her braids, the lean muscles of her body, the guileless face that hid none of her inner passion. Binding the girl's feet would not get her a wealthy husband, not with her horoscope.

He frowned and called for his servants. "Send away the foot binders when they come." The servants looked at him sidelong, but they bowed and did not question his orders. Li turned back to his daughter.

Chi's eyes had widened. Once again, her every emotion was there on her face for all to see.

Li sighed. How could he, a man born in the year of the Water Snake, ever understand his Fiery Horse child? Yet understand her he must. It was not part of the nature of snakes to be wasteful. If he could not reshape his daughter to be a rich man's bride, he could guide her to a path better suited to her nature.

I will not have you running wild," he said. "If you cannot marry, you should learn a trade. If you wish, you may work with me in the apothecary. In the morning, you will help me boil my medicines. In the afternoons, you will make my deliveries."

Chi gaped. She would be allowed, even encouraged, to run! She knelt before her father, pressing her forehead to the floor. "Father," she said, "you have honored me."

Later that night, Tsi Sha sent Chi her first dream. He gave her a beautiful run high in the cities of the clouds. A flock of birds swooped overhead. When she stopped to watch them, they joined together to form the characters of a single sentence.

You are mine.

"WHY DO YOU WATCH ME WHEN I DREAM?"

The years passed, and Chi turned 14. She still worked in the apothecary in the mornings, though now her father trusted her to tend the shop for a few hours each day by herself. She loved mixing medicines and talking to customers.

The most regular was Po Ta, who came in every day with some imagined symptom or another. The fat little boy had grown into an awkward teenager with a broad, earnest face and hands that would always seem too big for him. He appeared lost without his loathsome brother, and Chi often gave him something harmless to calm his nerves. He always thanked her graciously, and Chi came to look forward to his visits.

Over tea one morning, Chi asked, "Ta, what must your brother think of your spending so much time in our unworthy shop?"

Perhaps he does not notice." Ta put down his empty cup with a sigh. "But you and Fei do everything together," Chi said, swiftly refilling the cup.

"I thought so too," Ta said, staring morosely at the steam coming from his cup. "Fei has other friends now. Older boys who know how to gamble cleverly, handle fierce fighting crickets, and drink plum wine without throwing up."

Chi reached out and touched his hand. "But none of his friends are as true as you. Someday he will realize that."

Ta blushed, but did not move his hand away from hers right away. When he left, he said, "I'd rather spend a morning with you than own a dozen prime fighting crickets."

Chi smiled over his compliment while packing up jars of salves for the afternoon's delivery. Her route took her all over the city, from the silk markets near Universal Peace Bridge to the exclusive inns and courtesans at High Petal Court, to the mansions of the wealthy clients like Dowager Ang.

"So wise of you," the Dowager said when Chi arrived in the Ang courtyard, "to send your feet ahead to let us know you were coming. Be careful where you step. I have seen carp ponds smaller than your footprints."

At one time, Ang's comments would have set Chi raging, but now Chi said nothing. The Dowager bought the salves to soothe the sharp pain of the crushed bones and joints of her bound feet. Chi ran back home with a fierce joy, and then remembered why she could run at all. In less than a year, Tsi Sha would come for her.

She tried not to think of it, but she felt his presence building in the back of her mind as if answering a summons. *I would not run your regular route through the Central Square Market, my Fiery Horse.*

"Why?" she demanded, but the presence was gone. It was bad enough that he slid through her dreams, but did he have to haunt her while she was awake? To spite him, she ran through the market anyway. Nothing seemed amiss until she turned a corner and was ambushed by Po Fei and his new friends.

They reeked of cheap plum wine and pelted her with rotten peaches. Fei shouted after her, "What is larger than a dung heap and smells twice as bad? Your stinking feet, Li Chi!"

Li Chi ran home with her fists clenched and her gaze fixed on far distant points. Her hair and clothes stank of rotted peach, and wet sticky clumps dripped from her neck down her back. She breathed deeply and tried to rein in her rage, the way her father wanted. If she ran long enough, she could drown out the sound of their voices with the rhythms of her footfalls on the road.

Upon hearing her story, her father sighed. "You must exercise more caution, my child. None of this would have happened if you had watched where you were going and avoided Po Fei." He made her meditate on ways to avoid needless confrontation, but all Chi could think of that night was how much she hated Ta's older brother.

Ta arrived the next morning with news of Fei's disappearance. The boy had never come home that night. Some gossips thought that Fei had run off to avoid marrying a local girl he'd made pregnant, but Ta did not think so.

"He would have told me," Ta said a few days later. "He may not have asked me to come with him, but he would have told me he was going."

She listened to Ta often, holding his hand when he cried. Ta's gratitude embarrassed her. He did not understand that listening to his troubles made her forget her own.

In her dreams, running was never simply running. No matter where she went, she would see the flash of white scales and know that Tsi Sha watched her.

She was sick of it. Stopping her run, she turned and strode purposely in the direction she had last glimpsed the giant serpent. "Why do you watch me when I dream?"

I always study my prey

"I don t want you studying me anymore "

Why should I not? You are mine The serpent brushed against her legs She stepped out of reach. "Not yet."

You gave me your life, and I shall cherish it to the very end

"Please don't talk like that."

Why? All people die, and most in meaningless ways

"I have only one more year. I want to live it without hearing how you will eat me at the end. I want you out of my head "

There was a long silence *I have given you everything you desired and still you manage to spurn me Fascinating* Tsi Sha slid toward her and licked her cheek *Your spirit awes me What will it taste like next year?*

She could run, but there was no place to escape

One day as Chi had finished and closed up the shop, Ta approached her. "Li Chi," he said formally, "may we speak?"

"Of course " Chi sat on one of the benches in the courtyard, and beckoned him to join her

Ta remained standing "My father consulted with an astrologer about the woman I should marry " He fidgeted, hands fluttering as he walked. "Sheep and Horses often make good mates."

She gaped "Your father wants you to marry *me*?

"Not yet," Ta admitted "But with time I could convince him it was his idea. You come from a good family, and your father has no sons to inherit his prosperous business. My father would like that Rats always like money "

"Ta, I'm a Fiery Horse

"You wouldn't kill me Fiery Horses only endanger the mates who wish to rule them. I'm a follower. I followed Fei, I followed my parents, and I follow you. I've thought hard about it. You are strong and beautiful.. I would have you no other way "

He took her hands in his, and Chi could not tell whether she or Ta sweated more Her heart leaped, and then she remembered her promise to Tsi Sha She looked into Ta's earnest face and said, "You have honored and astonished me I cannot think of anyone who would be a better husband for me but … but I may not accept your offer "

Po Ta deflated before her eyes "I see

After Po Ta left, Chi wept. That night she dreamed about Po Ta rather than running

Tsi Sha lashed his tail angrily back and forth How dare she dream so deeply of another? He visited Po Ta himself. A thinner spirit than his brother, still Tsi Sha found Ta's feelings for L. Chi fascinating

The next night, when he checked on Chi's dream, she sat curled up in a corner *Chi?*

"You were careless," she said tonelessly. "Po Ta's mother found a gray scale in his room."

You re angry

I cared for him He was my friend and I'll hate you forever for taking him away

Ta is part of me now I have all of him, his memories, his emotions, everything The way he laughed His earnest smile. The beat that he felt when your breasts bounced as you ran

I could reconstruct him for you, In dreams

"No! Do you want to know what I really want? I want you to get out of my head and stay out Let me have my last two months alone and free "

But I need He broke off and looked into her eyes *I will give you what you want, Chi Two months But I shall miss our conversations*

After he left her, he tried creating a reconstruction of her from Po Ta s memories But it wasn t the same

Master Li found himself dreaming of his daughter again and again Images of her as a small child and a young woman jumbled together, moving so quickly from one to another that he woke up dizzy and disoriented

Later, the dreams began to focus in on a few images, reliving them over and over. Chi rising from her bath, her body glistening and wet Chi licking her lips as she carefully wrote down the herbs used in each of the day's medicines Chi running, arms outstretched and a smile of triumph on her face

Li had never had dreams like this before. When he tried to change the course of a dream through meditation, white scales glimmered at the edge of his vision and the dream would shift once again back to his daughter Li began to wonder. Were these dreams truly his? Or did they belong to another?

The next night, Li met the dream without resistance He patiently let the images of his daughter play out one by one, following them to their source like a blind man feeling along the length of a pearl necklace for the clasp At last he saw the creature who had been haunting his dreams

Li had no fear of serpents or their toxins But this creature was fantastically large, and Li mistrusted its death-white scales and strange golden eyes. He bowed cautiously. "Greetings to you, Great One "

Greetings to you as well, Master Li The voice in Li's head had the cool, measured feel of a hunter. *Why have you sought me?*

To find out why you stalk my daughter in my dreams

I could be stalking you

Li s heart skipped a beat, but he faced the serpent down A fellow snake? I think not. I'm too familiar to be interesting prey

You are more interesting than you think, Master Li. The voice was amused now *I stalk Chi in your dreams because I may not stalk her now in hers*

Li did not find the answer a comforting one And as the days passed, he watched his daughter with growing dismay Since Po Ta's disappearance, the girl had become a stranger to him. She sat quietly in the shop, the dutiful daughter with dark circles under her eyes She suddenly would forget what she was doing, grinding

"THE FLOWERS ON THE PATH STARTED AS NO MORE THAN DOTS OF

No answer He tried to coil around her to comfort her, but she wriggled out of his grasp. "Don't touch me! Don't you dare touch me

It's not the first time I killed for you

She stilled "Po Fei"

He was a complex meal, moody and full of jealousy and desire I m glad that you suggested him to me

"I never asked you to kill for me. Never!"

There was a long pause *Chi, what else would you have me do?*

"Bring Po Ta back!"

You loved him?

seed pods to a powder when Li had only wanted them cracked open. or boiling a potion so long that its potency steamed away

Master Li stopped letting her prepare the medicines unless he was there to watch every step Yet, if she had nothing to do, she paced every corner of the shop, polishing jars that had been polished only hours before

"Here " Master Li said, giving her some gnarled ginseng "Go to the back and chop this. You're scaring away my customers "

But her chops were uneven and awkward, and he gently pulled the knife away from her. "Something is out of balance," he said softly.

"Perhaps if we talk, we can find the source of the imbalance and restore your harmony."

He knelt down next to her, pushing his spectacles up his nose. He tried to think of how to bring up the serpent, but he did not have his daughter's gift for blunt conversation.

She looked up at him with a bleak expression in her eyes. "Father, why did you not abandon me on a rubbish heap when I was born? Why raise a troublesome Fiery Horse?"

He paused, knowing that if he did not get this answer right, the chance for talking would be over. Finally, he said, "There are many rare herbs that the ignorant destroy simply because they are toxins. They are fools."

He showed her jars of opium, arsenic, and the dried shells of carthandes beetles. "Poisons are the core of the apothecary's art: once you understand an ingredient, you will know when it will save a life or kill it. Poison and medicine are yin and yang. You cannot have one extreme without the seeds of the other."

"When I first saw you, I had no doubt of your nature. How you howled, your fists clenched and your face bright red with rage! The midwife urged me to be rid of you. But I could not bring myself to destroy something so strong, so powerful as the squalling newborn I held in my hands."

She blinked. "Am I medicine, or am I poison?"

Master Li smiled. "That depends on whether you are asking from the perspective of the patient or of the disease. What is poison to a white serpent could be a cure for a girl of passion and courage."

She dropped one of the jars, and it crashed and rolled along the tiles of the apothecary floor, scattering bits of beetle shell everywhere. "How did you know?"

"I also have dreams, Chi. Tell me, why does the serpent stalk you?"

His daughter sobbed, surprising Li with the force of her emotion. He took her awkwardly into his arms, and haltingly she began to explain the dangerous bargain that she had made with Tsi Sha. Li listened to his daughter's explanation, rocking back and forth in deep concentration as she spoke. He would not lose his only child to the white serpent that smelled of death.

It was time for Li Chi to meet her fate. She had not been able to sleep well the night before, and trembled as she entered the dream lands. Her father had drilled her in endless scenarios and possibilities, but in the end their plan was no more than a few hunches and one very wild hope. "You are a Fiery Horse, Li Chi," her father had said. "Be true to your nature."

In her mind's eye, she clad herself in a dress grander than she had seen on the courtesans of High Petal Court—its outer robe a long, beaded scarlet silk with gilded borders. She mentally oiled her hair and swept it up into an ornate pattern, and applied bits of color to her face and eyes. In a few seconds, she had sketched in details that would have taken all of her female relatives hours to achieve in the waking world.

Why are you dressed in wedding clothes?

She turned slowly, allowing herself to feel the sway of the heavy beaded silk as she turned. It was important that every detail be exactly right. Her heart raced as she realized that Tsi Sha lay directly behind her, watching. He could have taken her during her preparations. Was it only his curiosity that had held him off?

"There will never be a husband for me other than you," she said. "You claimed me, courted me, eliminated rivals. For seven years, you have sought my secrets, sharing an intimacy that goes deeper than that of human lovers. Will not tonight be our final consummation?"

What, no fight? Tsi Sha's golden eyes came even with hers. *No bargaining for more time?*

Was that what Po Ta did? Bargained for more time? She faltered a moment, then took a deep breath. Tsi Sha had not acknowledged her claim, but he had not denied it either. Perhaps that would be enough.

"We have the entire night left," she said, praying that saying so made it true. "What more do I need? You have given me seven years, seven years to grow strong and live vividly."

You did not see it that way, two months ago.

"I've had time to think since then. Time to realize how much you have given me." She stepped closer to the serpent. "Will you accept a gift in return?"

The serpent's tail twitched. *What sort of gift?*

"I would have you run with me." She reached out and put her hands on the soft scales on each side of the serpent's face. "Truly run, instead of just watching. Feel the run in the pounding of your heart, in the rhythm of your feet, in the play of air on your skin. Do you hear me, Tsi Sha?"

Serpents have no feet.

"You are Tsi Sha, the Dream Stalker. You are whatever you imagine yourself to be."

Why are you offering this?

"If you must ask that, then you know me not at all."

The serpent hissed and closed his eyes. *Scratch my head. Do it now, Li Chi.*

The serpent bumped his forehead against her hands, and she hesitantly scratched. His shimmering skin began to peel away like a long cloak. As the skin fell away, a well-formed man pulled himself out from under it. His scalp, back, and groin were dusted with fine scales that glittered like ice. When he opened his almond shaped eyes, they were gold with neither pupil nor white. He stood almost a head taller than she. *Will this do?*

"Yes," she said, with an intake of breath. He was magnificent.

She pulled the ties of her ornate outer dress, allowing the heavy fabric to pool at her feet. She kicked it to the side, standing in the short inner tunic, the one cut for running. She took his hand. "Come. Let us run where neither of us have run before."

Where would that be?

"Inside your mind, Tsi Sha. Inside your dreams."

He pulled back from her. *No one has gone there. No one.*

"Is this Tsi Sha, lover of surprises, seeker of rarities?" She leaned forward, knowing that he stared at the swell of her breasts. "Do you not wonder sometimes what it would be like to truly share yourself with another? It is our final night, and at the end of it, you will be able to know yourself through my eyes. Does that not appeal to you?"

Tsi Sha mistrusted this whole, well-orchestrated scene. Wedding clothes. Gifts. And though every word she spoke rang with truth, he sensed words behind them left unsaid.

He should just eat her now. Then he would know all she had planned and be able to study it all at his leisure. And yet, what if he then discovered that the gift was genuine? Would he regret forever denying himself the memory of one last run with his Fiery Horse?

He glanced at her sidelong, admiring the hair that gathered at the nape of her neck, her strong, well-shaped legs, and the heat that rose with such force off her body. Now that he was in man shape, her physical charms were almost as alluring as those of her spirit. What could one girl do to him, the Dream Stalker? Let her have her little plans. He would have the whole of her soon enough.

The inside of his head was like nothing she had imagined. They stood hip deep in the midst of a chilling white sea — a sea of out

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COLOR, AND THEN BLOOMED INTO HEAVILY SCENTED PEONIES.

Into the DARK

IT TOOK NO REAL EFFORT TO RETURN A LOST KISS IF IT'S BROKEN

E

welcoming kiss.

your meeting canceled?

by Patrice Sarath • Illustrations by Jason Ruthven

They watched the game in silence, a careful distance between them. The inning ended and the teams switched places. Matt tossing his mitt as he trotted toward the dugout. His awkward gait smoothed out in the deepening twilight and he moved with a secretive grace, the shadows filling in the unfinished features of his face. When they brought Matt home from the hospital, months after he was born because he had been so sick, she rocked him for hours in the dim, unlit house, letting the twilight soothe him after the harsh lights of the hospital. The memory only increased her anxiety.

"Jeez, what inning is this?" Phil said, as if he still had the right to know what she was thinking. "Fifth? It'll be dark soon."

"The field lights will come on in a bit," she said, fighting to keep her voice calm.

A breeze ruffled Eleanor's hair and she lifted it away from her face. As she did, a different presence caught her attention. Frowning, she turned. Down at the end of the field, where the baseline extended into the grass, a figure watched them intently. He brought a nagging familiarity, though the harder she stared back at him the more elusive he seemed.

The air had become thick with twilight. As the rest of the players faded into the darkness, Matt drifted into view, solid among shadows. The watcher solidified too. A waiting silence fell over the field.

With blinding suddenness the banks of lights thudded on, setting off a rising whine. The parents and boys winced and shielded their eyes, crying out, but laughter rose up too, intermingled with relief.

Eleanor cried out too, as Matt disappeared in the flash of artificial daylight. It took him a moment to come back into view, a moment after the bright spangles faded from her eyes, a moment of *not there* before he suddenly was *there*, holding his mitt across his face. One day he won't come back, she thought. The black spots blocking her vision would clear but Matt would be gone for good. She looked for the stranger, but he was gone.

She didn't remember much of the rest of the game, applauding politely when it was over, and parents and kids streamed out toward home. Outside of the playing fields, fireflies peppered the darkness with soft, flickering light. Matt walked between them, bouncing lightly on his feet, enthusiasm lighting his face, his wide-set round eyes bright with pleasure in the comfortable darkness.

"Did you see the last pitch? It was a curve ball, Dad! A curve! I threw a curve!"

Phil's face relaxed into a smile, so unguarded and sweet that Eleanor had to turn away.

"Yeah, I saw it," he said gruffly and made to drape an arm around his son. Matt wriggled free before he even made contact, and with Phil making a futile grab at his shirt he took off running, looping around in a circle, energized by the falling night. His laughter and light voice floated back over the fields. Parents flinched but the boys turned toward Matt, forgetting their fear and distrust. He called again, and Eleanor gasped as a pack of children streamed after him and disappeared into the night.

"Phil!" she cried. Other parents panicked too, deep-voiced fathers bellowing for their sons. For a brief moment the kids were illuminated by the field lights in the distance, and then disappeared again.

"Goddammit," Phil said, staring into the dark. "He's got to stop doing this."

"Bring him back," she said, fear catching in her throat. *Just bring him back.*

At home at last, in the brightness of their kitchen, Matt's exuberance was dulled. Eleanor turned all the lights on, and took a good look at her son. Gone was the light-footed miscreant who ran like a deer. Matt slumped on the counter stool, still in his uniform, his eyes heavy and his face slack. A new burn shone on his arm, already puckering into a scar. The note from the school said it was from contact with a door handle. She tried to ignore it.

"Want a snack?" she said cheerfully. He nodded with great effort, taking the bowl of sweetened milk and slurping at it. She bustled around the kitchen while he drank until he set the bowl down. "Ready for bed?"

"Yeah." He dragged himself off the stool. "Can I have the lights off tonight?"

Panic stabbed her in the heart.

"We talked about this, sweetheart," she said. "You rest better with the lights on." She didn't say sleep. She didn't know if he did sleep. He didn't argue. "Good-night, then. Don't forget to brush your teeth."

He trudged off up the stairs, and a moment later she heard the water running in the bathroom.

She gave him five minutes and then went up after him. He was in bed, eyes shut against the light and one arm across his face. She picked up his discarded uniform, soiled with grass stains and mud, where he left it on the floor, and rolled it up in a ball. She leaned against the door, head cocked as she watched him. He didn't look at her but he knew she was there. He spoke very quietly, but the hopelessness was evident.

"Can you at least turn off one light, Mom?"

She ached to do it. She clutched the balled-up uniform, remembering his flight at the ball field.

"Will you promise not to go out?" she asked. He didn't answer, just rolled over on his side, still protecting his eyes. That was answer enough, she realized. "Good night, then," she said and left him to himself.

She could hear the television clicking through channels as she went around the house turning off lights, leaving only one small night light on in the kitchen as she finished up the dishes. Phil had left out the iron skillet; Eleanor tightened her lips over her annoyance and wiped it clean, reheating it on its hook over the stove. Finished, she gathered the recycling to put it out for pickup. A burst of canned laughter followed her as she picked her way down the walk to the curb. It was cool, a light breeze fluttering her hair. A few stars floated in the misty night sky. Eleanor dropped her burden at the curb and turned to look at the house. Matt's window was a rectangular yellow square against the dark house.

As she stood there in the cool evening, something brushed by her, a firefly she thought at first, and she had a dim impression of gold and green, of chill morning air and damp earth, heading for the window. She started, flapping her hand at her hair as if to drive away an insect. For an instant she thought she saw a shadow of something at Matt's window, but whatever it was it was soon gone and the window was blank with light once more.

She never used to think of morning as twilight until Matt came along. Now she woke early, before dawn when the light was just beginning to fade in above the horizon. She lay there in the comfortable darkness, listening to Phil rumbling in his sleep beside her. Hard to think that he would be leaving soon. They were just trying to find the right way to tell Matt.

She heaved herself out of bed and shrugged into her robe, padding out to Matt's room to turn off the lights and get him up. It was hard leaving the peaceful semidarkness, and she winced against the flaring light of his bedroom when she opened the door. She closed her eyes and felt for the light switch, shutting off the ceiling light.

"Hey, kiddo," she said. "Time to get up. School day today."

He moved sluggishly, burrowing into his pillow, his angular and narrow body trying to curl into the small bit of darkness. She moved around the room, turning off lights one after another, chattering to him.

"Come on now, Matt, time to get up. Do you want a breakfast bar or cereal?"

He murmured something, she deciphered it as "just milk."

"I found a cereal that's not iron-fortified. You should try it."

He sat up in the dim room and blinked at her. His long, lank pale hair hung in disheveled locks around his head, as if someone had

twisted it wildly in the night

I'm not really hungry," he said

Well, get dressed. You'll get your appetite when you've been awake a while

She watched him drag himself off to the bathroom and went downstairs to start breakfast

Matt drank his milk from around the cereal, leaving it a mushy brown paste in his bowl, and pushed it away

Can I go out and play until it's time for school?"

She looked out the window, automatically checking the level of light The sun was fully up, sparkling on the early morning day

OK We'll be leaving in 15 minutes. Got your backpack ready?"

He nodded and bolted from the table A few minutes later she heard the first *thump!* against the garage From the upstairs she could hear the buzzing of the alarm clock Just as she was cleaning the table Phil came down, heavy-footed, heavy-eyed. He looked around, glared when he saw where the skillet was and pulled it down, clicking his tongue loudly He set it on the stove with more force than was necessary

She bit her tongue, said nothing, but he glanced up at her anyway

What?

I think we should get rid of the iron skillet, she thought Instead she just shrugged and left him to get breakfast for himself Choose your battles, their therapist had said She happened to be tired of the war It didn't matter anyway, she told herself. If Phil didn't take the skillet when he left, she would throw it away

When she got herself ready for work, she headed out, laden with her briefcase, Matt's pack, and lunch. He was pitching at the garage, his hair peeking out from beneath his Rangers ball cap. The ball thudded against the wall and he crouched and caught it as it came off the wall, running in. She could hear him whispering to himself, announcing some stream-of consciousness game—sure enough, he whirled as if to cut off a runner at first the move fluid, adult He stopped when he saw her and for a moment they stared at one another as if at strangers

Come on, Matt, time to go," she called finally, and he came as if pulled, reluctantly Matt slid into the car, neatly twisting to avoid the door, still whispering his play-by-play. She bent and strapped him in, making sure the buckle steered clear of his bare skin Their drive in was silent, the rising sun quieting Matt with each passing minute When she dropped him off at school, she watched him join the streaming crowd of children until he disappeared in the usual way

She saw the stranger again two nights later, during Matt's practice The early spring warmth had retreated against the cold, a misty wind blew and Eleanor and a few other diehard moms huddled on the bleachers The boys practiced on a damp field, fielding grounders from the coaches Matt crouched and ran with concentration his long legs spider-like, and he was unerring, scooping up ball after ball His hair hung damply down under his cap, and his lips and cheeks were flushed with the palest rose

Movement at the end of the bleachers caught her eye and she turned He was looking at her straight on and she wondered how long he had been watching her. Much like the other night, the rest of the world dropped away as she took in his white hair, blue eyes too wideset, and the delicate features that looked fox-like in the misty gray air *I know him* The familiarity nagged at her

"What do you want?" she said abruptly

"The boy

She had not expected that

"My son?

He is not your son."

She stared at him, dumbly uncomprehending

"He was never meant to live among you. He was meant to fade away But your machines kept him here, and now he suffers for it"

I don't know what the hell you are talking about," she said, regaining her voice

You know—you just refuse to see. This world is too bright for him You can see how he fades in the light Better to let him go into the twilight with us than fade away forever

You expect me to believe that?" she managed at last He shrugged

It doesn't matter whether you believe me or not. He is still not your son

Not your son. Against her will she thought back to the night of Matt's birth, when they were all three alone in the hospital room and she cuddled him in her arms. He slept and she dozed, safe in the cradle-like hospital bed, and she thought it was a dream that some one came in. took her baby. and put a different baby in her arms She had thought she had forgotten the memory Now she looked at his fox-like features and knew where she had seen him before

"Why?" It came out as a croaking whisper

He stepped back from the bleachers, looking up at her through the light mist

For the brightness," he said We can't resist the brightness an infant brings into the world."

She hugged her elbows to her sides, looking out over the field at Matt. "You took my son," she said

And in return you gave me this—" She stopped before she could say the rest out loud

You were supposed to let the changeling die," he said. As if it explained everything, she thought

And you expect me to just—give him back to you?" she said, her voice shaking.

You see how he suffers in your world. He would go if you let him."

He does not suffer!

The fox-man put his hand on the metal support of the bleacher It was only for an instant, then he snatched it away When he held it up to her Eleanor could see the burn across his palm, already festering

Leave the lights off tonight and you will see."

He walked off then, as ordinary as anyone in his long coat, hunched against the rain, but there was an overlay about him, of fox and bear, and small ferns that grow in shady places, and even something scaly. as a fish Eleanor watched him until her eyes burned, and then she had to blink

"Wait!" she cried A few mothers turned to look at her but she barely noticed He stopped, an ordinary man once more, and turned back to her. She struggled to keep her voice under contro.

"If he's not Matt—where s my son?

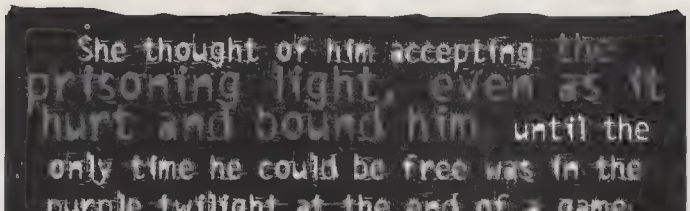
Turn off the lights," he said, "and I will show you

Just like that, he disappeared between the raindrops and was gone

"I can't believe that you fell for this guy and his mystic mumbo-jumbo. Fading, my ass," Phil said, pacing their living room

"You weren't there, you don't understand," she said. They argued in whispers, their voices low but vituperative, trying to keep their fight from Matt, upstairs in bed, in the bright light

She had a dim impression of gold and green, of chill morning air and damp earth.


She thought of him accepting the
prisoning light, even as it
hurt and bound him until the
only time he could be free was in the
purple twilight at the end of a game.

"Forget it, El This guy is a child molester and I'm going to call the police

It was an empty threat He wouldn't call They both knew what would happen if the police saw Matt's scars and burns It was bad enough dealing with new teachers each year, new nurses at the clinic

How did he know about the light?"

Jesus, Eleanor, all he has to do is come by the house, see the lights on in Matt's room every night " A thought struck him. "You didn t tell him where we lived, did you?

She breathed out, running her fingers through her hair. She had been doing it all night and the fine strands were rumpled and tangled. She couldn't bear to look at Phil, not with what she had to say. So she spoke to the far wall, where the TV sat in hulking big-screen silence

"I think he's right about Matt." She shot him a glance "About him not being ours

As emotionlessly as possible, she recounted her memory of the night of Matt's birth

And then the next day, Matt started having apnea," she finished "I couldn't say anything then—it would have sounded ..." she trailed off. She had been ashamed of speaking up, as if she were trying to say she didn t want her own baby She took another quick look at her husband. Phil was silent at first, his face a mask When he finally spoke his voice was heavy with anger

And you're just telling me this now? Eleven years later? Jesus, Eleanor—" he shook his head. "Even if we had a case against the hospital, even if it weren t *crap*, what the hell can anyone do about it now?

She winced even as anger darted through her Forgetting herself she raised her voice

"Crap? What the hell do you know about it? At least I had an excuse *I was the one who had just had a C-section!* I didn't see you wake up and try to stop whoever came in and took our son

Oh for—" he laughed, but his voice caught For a moment his eyes glistened "That's what this is about, right? My fault My fault Matt is messed up What did you say back then? 'Are you sure you quit smoking pot?'" He mimicked her cruelly and her face burned with shame "That's what this guy is all about, if there is a guy Just another reason to blame me for Matt

His voice broke completely and he stopped, swallowing hard When he could talk again, his voice was thick

Yeah, well, I'm sick of being blamed for this To hell with it Live with your fantasies, Eleanor. I'm not having any part of it

He threw down the remote and left her standing in the living room A moment later she heard the front door open and slam shut She picked up the remote and set it gently on the couch, trying to ignore the sick feeling in the pit of her stomach

Before she went to bed later that night she looked in on Matt He lay in his stupor, his long arms and legs twisted in the blankets, lank hair knotted and tousled. His skin was sallow and dry in the bright lights, nothing like the glow it took on in the pale evening, when the dusk could hide the rough scar tissue that disfigured his skin His hands were knotted and his arms were brown and lumpy with scars remnants of metal burns She thought about the other boy, the one she had held for only a few short hours the night of his birth. It was strange to think about, having another son A normal son

Eleanor's hand moved to the light switch but she didn't turn it off After a long moment she left the room, closing the door behind her

Phil moved out the next day. Matt said nothing when his father gave him a hug and told him he would see him the next morning, and then headed off to a motel, suitcase in hand Eleanor and Matt sat at the dinner table and pushed their food around on their plates. Though dinner was usually silent anyway with the three of them, Eleanor imagined that the humming of the refrigerator and the ticking of the kitchen clock sounded louder that evening

"May I be excused?" Matt asked at last, and she nodded, letting him go He pushed back his chair and brought his plate to the sink He glanced back at her and caught her eye, and quite deliberately bumped up against the handle of the cast-iron skillet

The shock brought him to his knees, his plate crashing to the floor Eleanor jumped up, her chair overturning, and ran to him

"Matt!" she cried as he rolled on the floor, curled up in pain amid the broken china and spilled food He made strange bleating noises which she hated, and she was rougher than she meant to be, shaking him. "Matt, stop it! Stay still and it will go away after a minute

He continued to roll back and forth and she struggled to hold him, crying as she saw his arm, weeping and already pus-filled from the iron burn

"Don't touch it! Don't touch it!" he screamed, pulling away from her, and she lost her hold on him, sitting back suddenly and knocking her head against the fridge. He scooted backward and scrambled awkwardly on his knees and one hand out of the kitchen It was ugly and painful watching him gallop that way as if he had momentarily forgotten how to stand on two feet, and she sat on the floor of the kitchen in the middle of the mess and watched him run off some where into the house

When her tears stopped and her heartbeat slowed, she got up and wiped her trousers clean of the food and went in search of him in all the rooms She was surprised to find him in his bedroom—it had never been a sanctuary. But he lay in bed, clutching his shoulder and staring out the window He was crying, another surprise. She didn t think he could shed tears

Oh, Matt," she said. "Why?"

"So you'll let me go," he said, and this time the glance he gave her was triumphant even in pain. "You have to see it now. I made you see it I don't belong here. Why won't you just let me go?

She sat down next to him and smoothed his white hair off his forehead

"I can't let you go, Matt You're my son"

He shook his head

"Mom, I don't belong here Look at me!" he said, holding up his arm, and she turned away, ashamed of herself "No, *look!*" At the

adult command, she looked at him, meeting his gaze "Something is pulling parts of me away and I can't get it back. Even baseball—" he faltered "It doesn't work anymore."

He fell silent, and she wanted to laugh and cry at the same time—had it been baseball that had kept him here? She thought of him accepting the prisoning light, even as it hurt and bound him, until the only time he could be free was in the purple twilight at the end of a game

Matt reached out and touched her arm, his fingers dry and dusty. Gone was the strange maturity He looked at her with an 11-year-old's fright in his eyes "I think I'm dying, Mom "

You're just feeling this way because of your burn and our separation, she wanted to say, but she was suddenly tired of discounting Matt's life She had had enough practice at it. Leave the lights on with a cheerful smile and a kiss good night, as if that made it better Pretend her world was the normal one, as if all children could only drink milk and honey and they all were burned terribly in the summer sunlight, as if contact with iron caused their skin to break open and ooze blood

Her gaze wandered around his room, touching on the baseball gear thrown untidily in the corner, the books on his desk, the trophies with their cheap gold paint piled on the shelf A normal boy's room, waiting for a normal boy

It would be easy to say she left the lights off for Matt's sake, not for the sake of a dream child who existed only in her deepest memories Eleanor looked down at Matt and touched his head

"Hey," she said quietly. "I'm going to clean up in the kitchen. Try to get some rest, OK?" She got to her feet Matt rolled over, keeping off his injured arm, and turned his back to her It was early evening, still bright out, sunlight streaming through his windows. *I don't have to decide yet*

She worked slowly, picking up the pieces of the broken plate and mopping up the mess She carefully hung up the skillet and washed the few dishes by hand, the warm soapy water soothing her nerves Outside the kitchen window the sunlight faded, the evening deepening toward gray Eleanor wiped down the counter, the table, and the stove, taking her time It was full dark out when she was finished, and she sat down at the table, looking around at the spotless kitchen. It was quiet and peaceful, the only lights the small ones over the stove. She wished Matt could see it before he left, and realized that she had made her decision

She didn't know if she should go up and watch him leave She didn't know if she wanted to She sat in the darkened kitchen, listening to the humming of the fridge, feeling a sleepiness come over her that made her head nod and her eyes droop.

Something made her snap awake with a jerk Eleanor gasped, heart thumping, and got up shakily The house was dark except for the lights over the stove. The stove clock, its red numbers glowing in the dark, read 10 o clock

"Matt?" she said softly, barely above a whisper She listened with acute hearing, but the only sounds were the noises of a slumbering house. Eleanor got up and willed herself up the stairs, with every step wishing she could stop and go back to the kitchen, to wait for Phil to come home and berate her for leaving the house in darkness.

She pushed open the door to Matt's room. It took a moment for her eyes to adjust to the faint starlight coming through the open window, the curtains blowing in the sluggish breeze. A still form lay on the bed and her heart leaped painfully He was still there Somewhere in the back of her mind the image of a normal boy was lost forever, not even to be mourned

She came in and touched Matt s head, resting her hand there lightly.

"I'm glad you didn t go," she said in a low voice. She was about to say more when it registered that he hadn t moved. Frowning Eleanor knelt beside the bed, peering at him in the darkness She shook him. "Matt? Matt? *Matt?*"

The house seemed too small for her shriek and she started to her feet and fumbled for the light switch, crying out again as the form on the bed exploded in the light

Perhaps it was just the aftermage shocked onto her eyelids, but she saw that it had not been Matt. It had been a boy with light brown hair like hers, a small, compact body, a face like Phil's, his complexion pale and freckled. What Matt should have been but was not, she thought, and now gone forever

Still wincing from the light, she lowered her arm and squinted at the bed The boy had disappeared Instead, Matt lay there, a skinny stick of a boy, with no more life left in him than a collection of sticks and leaves It was not just that he had died, she saw, he had never lived

She sat next to him and touched his straw-like hair, feeling that if she tried to pick him up he would fall apart in her arms, pieces trailing off down the stairs like twigs from a scarecrow. Her face screwed up, she hugged his matt instead, crying soundlessly, rocking back and forth Oh Matt Matt

"I don't understand," she managed at last "I kept my part of the bargain. I thought if Matt went away, then he could come back."

"What's done cannot be undone." The stranger from the ball fields waited at the window, palely insubstantial in the bedroom light. "Your machines and medicines fought hard to keep the changeling, and each time they revived it, they tore more life from your son. Finally he could not withstand the struggle and gave in. His body died, long ago."

The room was quiet for a long time. Eleanor thought of the long days fighting for Matt's life, pumping his lungs, squeezing his heart, the monitors cycling endless jagged green lines. Had *they* sat by, she wondered, while the life was sucked from her son? Had they at least tried to save him, to call him back?

If she had known, would she have pulled the plug on Matt's battle?

"Where is my son now?" she asked, her voice thick with tears.

"He is with us. Though he is not human, he keeps enough of the human boy's spirit that perhaps he will bring us the brightness we crave "

She thought of him running in the purpling darkness, free of the light that had tortured him all his life

"Will he be lonely? Frightened?" *Can I see him, just to give him a hug, to comfort him? Will I ever see him again?*

The stranger stared at her and she wondered if he knew what the words meant But Matt would know, and she cringed to think of him, no longer in pain, but forever alone among these strangers Just as he had been all his life, she thought

Wait she said, as the stranger made to leave. She held out the matt and the hail His face registered surprise and she smiled thinly "He likes to play catch."

He took them cautiously, backing toward the window, and was gone

Death from complications due to xeroderma pigmentosum, said the coroner's report, and Eleanor supposed it was the closest they could come to a diagnosis. She doubted *changeling* was in the medical texts. The funeral was private, as neither she nor Phil were close to their families, and Matt had no close friends

That evening she sat by herself on the bleachers at the Little League fields, watching the fireflies. She saw someone out of the corner of her eye and her heart leaped, but the tall man in the twilight was Phil He looked up at her, hands in the pockets of his overcoat

"I just want to know one thing," he said "Did you leave the lights off?"

She nodded. "He had suffered enough, you know "

"And you made that decision unilaterally?"

"No, Phil. He did "

She waited uneasily for his burst of anger, and when it came it was low-voiced and vociferous

"I will never forgive you for this

He turned and walked off, disappearing into the dusk. Eleanor watched him go, fireflies in his wake, and said to the quiet night, "Neither will I "

MAGIC IS POWERFUL, COLD, UNBENDING, DISTANT, OVERWHELMING. BEAUTIFUL?

LeeWard to the Sky

Crouched beneath the wet stone door frames in the old town of Brinkof-sea sits Stigin Niddle, fingers too bent to make the magic, build the magic, push the magic, flying, driving the night into morn

Some see her, bent Stigin Niddle, making the finest sails the fleets have worn. Sails so thin a child's smile shines through them, so strong the storms of black winter can't tear them. Sails over her bony legs, like a wedding dress about a corpse, sails flowing like honey and sunlight to the edge, but never beyond the stony arch of the doorway where Stigin Niddle sits, pushing magic.

Boat captains treat her like queen-goddess-nymph ruler of luck and weather. Buy her sails with never a haggle. Pour gold at her feet, bow away, and adorn their great hulled ships with fabric richer than their finest tales

By Devon Monk
Illustration by Laurie Harden

Crewmen treat her like mother's own yes-lady, as you say lady, and tip their hats as they go by to find less respectable women leaning from up-above windows with perfume and bright dresses promising moist warm evenings

Fish-hawkers treat her like ugly girl odd-out sister and keep her fed, fish and crab and sleek, pungent eel

Magic under foot, ugly, happy Stigin, spinning sails in the damp doorways of Brinkofsea

Until the landman came, from high mountain stone and thunder, pushed by a wind that smelled of change, looking for magic caught by the small sea town, hungry for something brief and sweet, like the last wine of summer on a lover's lips

He didn't know he wanted Stigin Niddle. He didn't know magic was an ugly thing

Twelve days he walked the cobbled town, twelve days striding, bootheels against wood dock, eyes taking in slate sky and jade-tipped waves. Looking for the taste, the song, the filling for a hunger that pushed at his skin and bone, the need that only quieted at night in the amber embrace of ale

Met a man, a shipman-boatwright of strong, long-fingered building hands. A man whose hands bent plank, carved ships from mind to solid, breathing creatures of tall mast and rig

Lovely Ladies, he called them, Grand Dames of tomorrow's horizon. The shipman-boatwright made his own kind of magic, and gave it to the vessels he created

The man from the mountain almost found what he searched for there, his own hands pressed against sea soaked teak, the lift and fall of ship rocking his hips like a languid lover Eyes closed, mouth open he breathed in the wild call of the sea, of the ship straining against the tethered hold of land, thirsty for the sky's edge and knew this was as close to magic as ever he had come

But the birds above called out, the wind drew against his skin, reminding him of land, of his mountains, of the hollow hunger deep within

A false love, this ship. The man opened his eyes and shook his head. No, to the shipman-boatwright whose eyes were so caught by the beauty of his own creations, he did not notice the man leave—did not know he was once again alone with the great mahogany lady. No

Yet something about the ship called to the man from the mountains, lingered even as his boot touched the cob-solid gangplank Something here, a part of this ship, was that which he sought

The man from the mountains turned, looked over shoulders wide and strong from life between the stone and wind of cliffs Something there, in the ship, a half heard song, caught between gull cry Soft as a feather shaving sky. A snap

The man from the mountains smiled. Yes The woven strands, gossamer as diamond-spun spider silk, caught by wind to snap in short brilliant laughter, like a voice caught singing Magic

He walked back to the deck, boots beating rhythm to his heart and pushed both hands into the unfurled sail

He felt the shock of need roll down his spine to pool, heavy and warm, between his thighs Never closer than this, than his hands against a sail too fragile to exist in a world of hook and lashings. Never closer had he been to ending his search. To finally know

He shook the shipman-boatwright until his eyes cleared of rapt fascination for the vessel Sail, he asked Where?

Lips bowed in a smile, the shipman pointed Stigin Niddle Weaver, maker, doorstoop croucher In the heart of Brinkofsea, perfect, magic Stigin

The man from the mountains ran Boots fell in cobbled tones, singing his need, pounding with haste So close. Would that which he sought slide away like cloud to sun, before he could glimpse it, know it finally, fully?

If he were in his mountain's hold, his feet would have known the way to go, but here in the shack and alley town of Brinkofsea, his feet followed street after street, coming no closer to the center, the call, the thing called Stigin Niddle

Night came, bringing a cold wet cloak from the ocean's depth. Brinkofsea huddled in the cold, doors closed, windows drawn Lantern light pushed out from the cracks between cedar shakes, throwing gold rods of light into the slick cobble streets. Smoke slipped up stone chimneys, mingled and mixed with fog

The man from the mountains stopped. He changed his breath, until it rose and fell in rhythm with the ocean Magic was here, wrapped in the fog, he could taste it like honey on his tongue, feel it like the cold heat of mint against his skin

But magic is elusive, hidden, the sound of madness creeping. Though the man followed the call, careful to keep his footfalls soft, his breathing in rhythm with fog muted waves, magic was ho-ho, and you won't see, in the dark wet streets of Brinkofsea

On the cusping break of night to dawn, the man walked the last alley, the last street, morning cry of bird and hard smell of baked salt bread filling the air where fog had once lain, fog which pulled away without the man feeling its loss

Shipmen called while feet of runners pattered across cobble Tide is turning, night is turning, life is turning. Up now, men and boys, up now rope and sail, up upon the crashing waves, before the chance is gone

With each step, the man from the mountains wondered if fate was turning, if he too should shoulder against the wind, find his way home, taking defeat at his side

And there, near the end of the alley, in the shadows of a doorway, leeward to the sky, blind to the wind, a woman sat sewing Sails the color of dawn-painted clouds billowed and shimmered, lying like maidens of gossamer, fay beauty, bare to the pale sun, calling, calling, magic here beneath the stone, in the cold dark shadows

Eyes lost in the gray of the stone which surrounded her, she rocked slowly, her mouth pulled in a smile only babes or the mad can wear.

So drawn to the sails, the man did not see the woman behind them for several moments When he did look, his eyes, dazzled by gossamer beauty, could not believe the vision before them

Thin to nothing, hair long and wild, Stigin Niddle sat, her sharp face tipped to the side, as if she heard a song no mortal could follow, her fingers lithe and long, spinning magic beneath her palms into cloth Eyes lost in the gray of the stone which surrounded her, she rocked slowly, her mouth pulled in a smile only babes or the mad can wear

And despite the hollows of her cheeks, the pale skin covered with thin silver tracks of snails gone by, despite the cast of blue about her lips and eyes, as if she were long adrift in the cold, cold sea, the man from the mountain knew that magic, the filling, the need that had called him from snug and warm mountain holding was here, before him, in the lifeless eyes and flying hands of Stigin Niddle

A fish hawker came, tossed yesterday's carp at her feet, stared at the man of the mountain, the stranger who could not take his eyes off the woman beneath the sails and knew, with pity, that the man had never seen the ugly side of magic

The fish hawker put a strong calloused hand on the arm of the man—wet and cold—his skin running with droplets of last night's fog, his breath oddly in time with the ocean caressing the edge of Brinkofsea, in time with Stigin s fingers pushing, coaxing cloth to spring, full and sewn, from nothing but her hands

The fish hawker pulled on the man's arm, intent to take him somewhere warm, a fire, a hot mug of tea away from the ugly odd woman, spinning magic for a world she could no longer see. But the man from the mountain pushed aside the fish hawker's hand, and before he could think again, before the fall of one wave curled into another, he bent, and caught Stigin Niddle's hands between his own

You are bound no longer to this town, bound no longer to stone and shadow, no longer to magic's call Come with me, lady Stigin, and the mountains themselves will bow down to you, hold you dear, precious, love you—but less even than I shall love you

The hawker laughed. Could the man from the mountain think a woman such as that, a creature such as that, would hear his words, bide his call? Magic has fed upon her humanity, sails have replaced her soul She is but an empty shell, lost and singing, mad, and happy among the drift of sea and swell

Ugly Stigin, perfect odd, sister Stigin Not a creature that can be captured, not a woman to hear the heart of a man

The man listened not to the hawker's words, listened not to the gulls crying fool, fool, listened not to the slow drip of fog and morning sliding down the stone, down Stigin s shoulders, her hair, her face He listened instead to his heart, pounding with the strength of the mountain, the land come to claim that which the sea had taken, his lady, his love

Fool, fool, the gulls cried from above, poor mistaken fool, the hawker echoed

But Stigin did not hear the words of the hawker or the gulls She did not hear the crash of the waves. Slowly, slowly, like sand sliding down stone, Stigin's hands rested, her fingers lying still and white as folded wings against sails that no longer spun

The man from the mountains laughed out full, and plucked her up, the nearly nothing of her left, and pulled her against his chest Love I will give you, love shall you know. No longer the dampness of doorway, no longer the endless skein of sails to be spun

At the moment the man held her, cradled her face against his own, the hawker cried out, the townsfolk cried out, the captains who had called her queen-nymph-goddess, the crewmen who had called her yes-lady, as-you-wish lady, called out as one, for then the spell was broken, and Stigin Niddle was no longer the heart of gray Brinkofsea, no longer the single, simple vessel for the magic of sail, the taming of the sea to pour through

They speak of her still, of Stigin Niddle, of the ugly, magical creature born of the sea, through whose hands the finest of sails were woven. They speak of the day magic was lost to the town of Brinkofsea, and they speak of the man whose hands were not afraid to touch, and whose heart was not afraid to love the ugly beauty of magic ❧

Youth may be callow and old age infirm, but
when they learn to work together, they are invincible.

LINDEMAN'S LIFE

Lindeman Courthouse was born on August 7, 1910 on the corner of Ash and Taft, where the first of the tree streets met the last of the president streets. He had a coal-fire heart, an iron skeleton, and a salt-and-pepper Ohio-granite skin. He looked out over the joyous summer crowd from his one hundred front windows· 10 to a floor, 10 floors high. His many-paned skylight gazed upward. He thanked the powers of imagination, stone, and fire that brought him life.

Horses and carriages came and went, depositing more and more happy people. Men wearing straw hats and white suits stepped down first, then turned and bowed and lent assisting hands to women in white summer dresses and flowery hats. A man in green coveralls wandered about scooping horse manure from the cobbles of the street. Occasionally, Lindeman saw the sun glint off the chrome of a motorcar passing on one of the farther streets. They were loud, smelly, and not allowed near his birthday party

By Eric M. Witchey
Illustration by Chuck Demorat

Lindeman wore swadd.l.ng clothes of draped red, white and blue. The summer sun warmed his granite flanks. A great red ribbon barred the people from mounting his red stone steps and opening his heavy, walnut doors. The mayor, wearing a top hat, spats, and black tails, stood on Lindeman's steps and called out to the people. "Our new courthouse, the Lindeman building, is the pride of our growing city. It is our monument to future generations, our gift to our children, and our promise of prosperity. May it stand for a thousand years!"

Lindeman stretched, tall and proud.

The mayor cut the ribbon, and the people opened his doors and poured in. He looked out over the tops of short, wooden buildings toward the Ohio farmlands and the shining great lake in the distance. He was the center of this land of people. They had made him that, and he was determined to serve them well.

"Think you're a sharpie, eh, greenhorn?" The whisper came from behind Lindeman. He turned his attention from the bright countryside and his happy crowds to the dark shadows in the alley connecting Ash Street to Birch. The alley was empty except for Lindeman's afterbirth: garbage cans, broken planks, bent nails, and sawdust.

"Tall and important, ain't cha?" It was the building beyond the alley. He was a long, low beam-and-plank building on a rough stone foundation. His old-fashioned, sloped roof had at least a dozen gables looking out over the alley at Lindeman's back. Moss grew on his slate shingles. Long after he'd been born, pipes had been wired and trussed to his outside to bring water and sewer into him. He had once been whitewashed, but his clapboard walls were the gray of weathered wood, shadowed with water stains. He smelled of mold and mildew.

Lindeman ignored the gnarled old wreck from the last century. He turned back to his birth celebration.

"New and full of yourself," the old building said. "Sure they love you and need you. Probably looking up at the sky with your fancy skylight windows and thanking the powers of stone and fire for your iron skeleton and stuff skin."

Lindeman couldn't help himself. He looked away from the gaiety and said, "I'm the Heartland County Courthouse."

"You think I was never born?"

Lindeman had to admit to himself, it was a new thought. Of course, he considered, every thought was a new thought. "I suppose you were," he offered. "You're just a row house, maybe a warehouse. You're so low, I know you've never seen the lake in the distance, and you can't see my people dancing in the streets to celebrate my birth."

"You mean from down here in your shadow? You mean from behind and below you? Is that what you mean?"

"I mean—" Lindeman stopped himself. He wasn't very old, but he was sure he'd been rude. "I'm sorry."

"Let it go, boy. You're new. You don't know any better." The old building seemed to settle in on itself a bit. "When I was born, there was a party too. There weren't as many folks around here back then. There weren't any buildings between here and the lake, so I could see it fine. You see, up 'til today, I was the courthouse."

"You?" Lindeman wondered if old buildings were liars.

"Someone was. Why not me?"

Lindeman looked around. Aside from him, the old building was the largest in the area. "What are you now?" he asked.

"County archives. Call me Archie."

"Didn't they like you?"

"For a long time, I was the best thing in town. But it's a time of steel and coal, boy. I'm from the times of timber and corn. For the past 10 weeks, they've been taking my insides away and filling you full with them. First the furniture, then the files, then the people. Every week, I've lost a little more of myself to you. My books are gone. My pictures are gone. I'm nothing but walls and floors now."

"They took everything from you and gave it to me?"

"No," Archie laughed. "I still have a basement full of old journals and ledgers, and my pigeons are still my pigeons." But even as Archie spoke, a fledgling in a nest on the sill under his center gable spread its wings. The young bird leaped from the nest, flapped awkwardly, and fell.

Lindeman leaned and caught the young pigeon on the lintel of his back door.

"Nice catch," Archie said.

Lindeman was happy to have saved Archie's pigeon, but Archie sounded sad.

"Does it hurt?" Lindeman asked.

"Does what hurt?"

"Them taking your insides away and putting them into me?"

"I'm old," Archie said. "I'm wood and stone. My floors are warped. My walls are mildewed. It's been years since I've been whitewashed. I don't smell like the future, and we are all moving into the future. We all age."

"I won't," Lindeman said. "I'll live for a thousand years."

Archie's dry laugh upset Lindeman.

"My skeleton is iron," Lindeman said. "My walls are stone. My floors are made of fireproof tile. I can't warp. Only my windows need paint. I won't age any faster than my granite."

"You're the future, Lindeman," Archie said. "So was I, once. So was I."

New and proud, Lindeman served as courthouse. Archie, in the shadows beyond the alley, silently swallowed the overflow of records, proceedings, deeds, births, and deaths. Other cities sent their mayors to see Lindeman. Architects came to study him. In spite of the attention, Lindeman did what he could for the old courthouse. When the sun was right in the spring and the fall, he reflected as much as he could down onto Archie's grime-encrusted gable windows. When the pigeons filled Lindeman's upper floors with their nests, he sent some to nest on Archie. When, after a few years, painters came to coat his window sashes in fine, green paint, he shrugged and spilled as much as he could on Archie's alley-side wall. It wasn't much, but the old building thanked him.

One day, a long line of men formed outside Lindeman. They were men he knew. They had all walked on his tiled floors at one time or another. Most had voted in his foyer. Some had registered deeds and titles in his offices. Some had been married in his courtrooms and had recorded the births of their children in his files. A few had even slept off drink in the cell in Lindeman's basement.

"What are they doing?" Lindeman asked.

"Going to war," Archie answered.

"War?"

"They're fighting for the right to have courthouses. People across the ocean want to tear you down. The men are going to die so you'll continue to stand for their children."

"There are people who don't like me?"

"Kings and emperors hate you."

"Do they hate you?"

"They don't much care about me. I'm only an archive now. Still, if they can, they'll burn me down."

Air hissed outward between Lindeman's sashes in a long gasp. "How do you know about war?"

"When I was about your age, there were people who owned other people. The people that were owned weren't allowed to use me. Mostly black people."

"They couldn't vote?"

"Or own land or get married. Folks around here went to fight over it. The black folks used to hide in my basement on their way up north to Canada. In Canada, nobody could own them," Archie was silent for a while.

Lindeman thought he saw the windows in Archie's gables ripple with cloudy shadows from the past.

"That was a great time," Archie sighed. "A truly great time."

"Are there still men who can't use me?"

"In other countries. In this country everybody but the women can use you."

"Women use me. I have the births of all their children in me, Archie."

"Men record them. The women can't vote. Only men."

"Why?"

Archie shuddered in a chill lake wind. Rain started to fall. His streaked and dirty windows seemed darker than usual. "Things change, Lindeman," he said. "Things change."

It was all the answer Lindeman got.

Time passed, and some of the men came back from the war. A gravestone carver chiseled the names of the men who didn't come back into a stone. They put the stone on the lawn in front of Lindeman's Taft Street doors. A big, green cannon came to live on the lawn next to the stone.

Not long after, the men and women started to argue about who could use Lindeman and how. It scared Lindeman. He was afraid that his people would have their own war.

He and Archie decided which side they were on. They did what they could to help the women. He and Archie twisted their door frames so the locks didn't hold at night. They let the women sneak in and have meetings. They hid court orders against the women when they could. They even sent their pigeons out to bomb police when the women marched on Lindeman's lawn.

Finally, the argument ended. The women stood in front of him in crowds. They draped him in red, white, and blue again. They sang and prayed and cried tears of joy.

Archie and Lindeman were proud of themselves. Their pigeons circled in the fall sun. The lake glistened in the distance, and women came into him to vote.

Time passed. People were born. People died. Harvests came and went. There was a long bad time when Lindeman didn't get much paint, when men stood in lines because they were hungry, when everyone was sad. One cold, spring morning during that time, Archie said, "Lindeman?"

"Archie?"

"Goodbye and good luck."

"What do you mean, goodbye?"

"You're a good kid, Lindeman. You'll be fine."

"Archie, you're not making sense. What's wrong?"

"I'm just tired. I'm going on today. It's been good working with you."

"Where will you go?"

"Don't know."

"How can you go?"

"The crane and the ball will send me. You have the last of my papers. Take care of them. Don't let the people forget who they are."

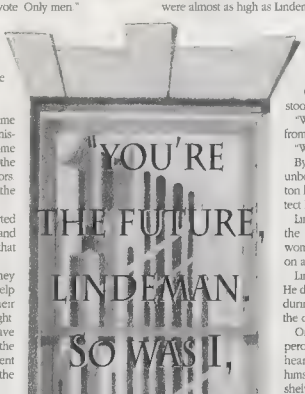
"I need you," Lindeman said. "Who will show me how?"

"The crane's coming. Just do your best."

The crane came, belching steam and smoke. Lindeman watched in horror. He sent out the pigeons, but they had no effect on the steel monster.

With a shuddering, dusty death rattle, Archie fell in on himself.

A dozer came and scraped away every trace of him. A shovel came and dug a hole. Trucks came and poured liquid stone. Men, happy to be working, came and set red steel beams that rose until they were almost as high as Lindeman's roof. Then they rose higher, and higher, and higher until Lindeman couldn't believe they could rise any higher without ripping a hole in the sky itself.



On December 7, they stopped.

On December 8, new lines of men stood outside Lindeman.

"What is it?" a new, young voice asked from Archie's space beyond the alley.

"War," Lindeman said.

By the end of the summer of 1942, the unborn building was gone. His steel skeleton had been turned into weapons to protect Lindeman.

Lindeman wept for Archie. He wept for the tall child lost and for the men and women whose names would be engraved on a stone on his lawn.

Lindeman did his part for the war effort. He did his part for the boom afterward, and during Korea, and through Vietnam and the confusion surrounding it.

One dark winter night during a prosperous time late in the century, Lindeman heard someone crying. He looked into himself. Deep in a basement room, amid shelves of boxes filled with old journals and notes, the last of Archie's memories, he found a young black man sitting at a table weeping.

Lindeman twisted and shrugged. A window on the third floor opened a crack. A door in the courtroom halls creaked. The wind moved within him, and he whispered, "Why are you crying?" The man looked up, startled. He looked around, but saw no one. Still, he answered, "My grandfather was a slave. I know that. He came here, but I don't know where he came from or how."

"Is that important?"

"I need to know who I am."

Archie's memories stretched upward and around the man, shelf upon shelf and row upon row. Lindeman remembered Archie's stones of the people who hid inside him. He remembered what Archie had said: "Don't let them forget who they are."

He inhaled cool lake air. He heaved and stretched. A book fell. A startled rat darted along a shelf. It bumped an ancient wooden box. The box teetered and fell. It shattered on the floor near the man and his table.

Continued on page 80

THE ARTIST OPENS AN ESCAPE HATCH FROM REALITY INTO A WORLD OF DRAGONS, MYTHOLOGY, AND METAPHOR.

TODD LOCKWOOD'S

MYTHIC ROOTS

BY KAREN HABER

When Todd Lockwood was 19 years old he discovered *Dungeons & Dragons* and fell madly in love with the seminal role-playing game. He had no clue that he would someday help create the defining images for his favorite game, but that's exactly what happened when he painted one of the dragons that graces the boxed version of the immensely popular third edition of the game from Wizards of the Coast.

"It was a dream come true," says the soft-spoken artist over the phone from his Washington home. "Especially now that *D&D* seems to be enjoying a renaissance among gamers—it's more popular than ever."

A gamer at heart, he sums up gaming's appeal as "a way to be an adult and still play make-believe. If you were a creative kid—and I was—I played Cowboys and Indians, and Captain Kirk was one of my childhood heroes—and there just comes an age when it's not cool to run around on the playground with baseball bats shooting them like guns."

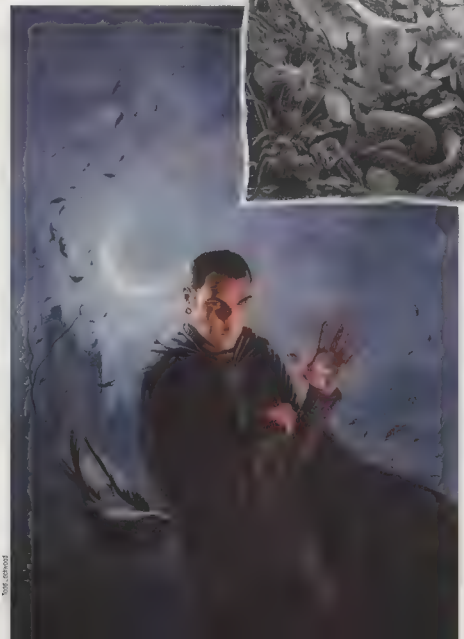
It's an escape hatch from reality that's action/adventure oriented." As to the prevalence of male *D&D* players, he gives full credit to testosterone. "It was designed by a guy for guys."

Lockwood certainly has a soft spot when it comes to dragons, and his specific take on those scaly critters can be seen in images like *Birdfeeder* and *Dragonlance*. His dragons may be fearsome or funny, but above all, they are convincing.

"I do like dragons," he says, chuckling. "The challenge is to make them believable. You pretty much do have to use everything you know about reptiles and cats and birds and skin and light and volume. It all comes into play. A lot of artists sculpt their dragons and photograph them before they paint them. If I had enough time to do it I think it would be fun to sculpt them. At the very least you have to be aware of the volumes in your head, think three-dimensionally.

"My dragons tend to have catlike anatomy in their forelimbs and hindquarters and that's not by accident. Whatever it is that makes the lion the king of the beasts, dragons have in spades. And whatever it is that draws us to lions and, for that matter, dinosaurs. Fierceness. Intelligence. Predatoriness. Overwhelming presence and power.

© Todd Lockwood



Todd Lockwood

Lockwood finds it a bit ironic that he spends his days creating fantasy art. "Originally I was a science fiction fan, especially of the television shows of the late sixties like *Star Trek*. Loved science fiction—Larry Niven, Robert Forward, hard science, and astronomy. But I like astrology too, because I like that mythological link. In palmistry, the head line, if it's straight, means you're intellectual, and if it's curved, it means you're creative. Mine is forked: it's both straight and curved. But the curved side is stronger than the straight. Maybe that's why I ended up in fantasy."

Some of the blame can be laid at the feet of J.R.R. Tolkien and *Lord of the Rings*, which drew Lockwood at least halfway into the fantasy camp. No small wonder, then, that he was ready and waiting when *D&D* debuted. A graduate of the Colorado Institute of Art, Lockwood spent 15 years toiling in the salt mines of advertising, playing *D&D* and *Earthdawn* in his spare time. He eventually

ABOVE: Down the River *was Todd's first sci fi commission—for* Asimov's *in 1993. OPPOSITE TOP:* Kali, *a personal work, was inspired by events at Todd's first convention. OPPOSITE BOTTOM: The man in* Crescents *has been branded with a glowing symbol by Hecate; the crescent shape is echoed in the composition.*

escaped to the West Coast and a safe roost with Wizards of the Coast.

Lockwood characterizes his job as a dream job, and his enthusiasm for the work is evident in every image on his Web site (www.toddlockwood.com). One of his favorite job benefits has got to be the Wednesday evening *D&D* games, although Lockwood says with regret that he doesn't have time to be a Game Master now.

Another powerful influence on his art and life has been the work of Joseph Campbell. "Myths compel me even more than fantasy now, ever since I discovered Campbell's work and the relationships of different myth systems to each other over millenia. To see how different belief systems affected each other and came together in different ways and became different things was very illuminating.

"Fantasy connects to those mythical roots that have accompanied mankind from the beginning—perhaps that accounts, in part, for its enduring popularity."

Mythological roots are tightly wrapped around the elements of one of Lockwood's favorite personal works in pencil, *Kali*. This densely rendered tour de force celebrates life—and death—while taking the viewer from the edges of abstraction into superrealistic detail, from fractal patterns to butterfly wings, and back.

I became fascinated with the meanings behind the metaphors," he says. "That's what led to *Kali*, although she's more of an Earth Goddess to me than the legendary destroyer Kali. That's the kind of work I'd like to do more of, personal work that's bubbling away on my back burners."

Lockwood cites Frank Frazetta, Michael Whelan, and Brom among his many artistic influences. "But I'll confess that I really wanted to be Michael Whelan." His work has received accolades from the Art Directors

ABOVE: A ghost is caught between good and evil represented by the angel and demon on the columns to either side of her OPPOSITE: Todd's dragons are pure fantasy, but their anatomy is taken from beasts of this world This painting graced the cover of the Dragonlance Annotated Chronicles

Club of New York and the CA Annual, has garnered several Chesleys, and has appeared in the Spectrum annuals

Lockwood has painted in acrylics and in oils and prefers the latter although he has worked in many media from pencil to computer He is struck by the peculiar paradox of creating mystical and mythic images by digital means. Although Lockwood mistrusts the effect of digital media upon young artists, he's achieved an uneasy truce with it

"I use *Painter*, especially on tight deadlines It's seductive as can be, so easy and immediate and spontaneous. But when you're done you don't have a painting, and that's what troubles me about it. For 20 years I always had an end product I could sit back and look at or bring out of a drawer and show somebody, or hang in an art show Or sell

"It's troubling, too, in the broader sense that art and the art of painting are going to become lost There will always be painters, I suppose, and perhaps I'm lucky that I know how to paint. Because every quarter the art schools crank out a new bunch of artists who don't know how to draw a figure but they know how to open *Poser* and pose a mannequin. Or they don't know which two colors to combine to make green because the palette on a computer is just point and shoot

My biggest complaint about computer art is that it all looks the same, save for the exceptions, like Rick Berry and a few others, who can also paint like crazy with real media

"With too much computer art you see the hand of the computer rather than the artist's It's a different kind of thought process. Some guys do amazing things with computers—I don't want to fault the really good artists—but I think it hamstrings a lot of people, certainly in fantasy, where you have to create things that look real and do not exist

You can't make a dragon by just sticking wings on a crocodile You have to have an idea of how an animal goes together. Which sort of animal you're going to use for what part of the anatomy. A computer won't teach you that because you don't think, it thanks for you It enables mental laziness

For Lockwood, the good side of the technological revolution is the ability to get images out of the computer. "I print 8½ x 11 prints on my Epson printer that are far more beautiful than I ever got from a photo lab—and I can tweak it in *Photoshop* until it satisfies me and afford to print as many as I want I can print and sell my work directly

It's made me accessible to people who want images which is a win-win

Nevertheless, it's bothersome to see so many people so disconnected from their reality from what we are—by technology

Given these concerns, it's no surprise that Lockwood makes a special effort to answer questions from burgeoning artists. "I've always been grateful for the help and encouragement I received from established artists like Michael Whelan, Kevin Murphy, and Joe DeVito. The supportiveness of artists in this field is unique I can tell you it doesn't happen in advertising And I want to continue that habit of giving, of helping younger artists along. Even if it takes a lot of time, which it does "

His Web site has a very generous section devoted to discussion of basic technical concerns for beginning artists

I hate to ignore those people because I was one of those people I was a fan before I was a creator In 15 years of advertising I never got a fan letter, so the reaction from the fans has been very, very gratifying

"There's a considerable connection between fans and artists in fantasy and I remember fondly the artists—who are still good friends—who took the time to give me honest critiques and answer my questions and introduce me to ideas I hadn't considered before So I can't not do the same. At the same time, it's a lot of work, so nowadays I say, 'Go to my Web site and read my FAQ '

Recently Lockwood rediscovered the delights of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* while reading it aloud to his children "It added a surprising dimension those words were written to be read aloud." As of this writing, he's seen the movie six times and intends to see it several more times before it closes. And he may read the work one more time

He's also drawn his children into playing *Dungeons & Dragons*, and looks forward to reigning as Game Master in his own home—at least for the time being. Dragons and gaming may be in Lockwood's blood, and that of his offspring. Time will tell. Right now, he's happy to have led the way to the escape hatch from reality Lockwood's family and fans alike can take comfort in the knowledge that he's holding that door wide open ❧

EVEN *Small* PRAYERS

When starving artist meets starving goddess, destiny ... or doom ... will ensue.

BY KATHRYN J. BROWN ILLUSTRATION BY MEKE KERR

The goddess Ventl was starving. Desperate, she spun soft currents down the alleyway, building shrines to herself out of cigarette butts, pigeon feathers and greasy wrappers. She could always find offered prayers here, lying forsaken under the garbage that they were too dangerous to eat. Prayers forced from the lips of those with no faith left as empty and painful as dry heaves. Prayers that could sicken even an adult goddess. They were best left to rot.

If only she had even one temple erected in her honor, she could go there and feast on mantras roasted over candle flames. Or maybe contemplations pressed wafer thin between the pages of sacred books. Her mouth watered at the tales her elders told her. She'd longed for the banquets of worship that they enjoyed. But she was a minor goddess whose 12 decades left her a juvenile in the eyes of her pantheon. An urban street brat, her only power was wind, and her only sustenance was an occasional scrap of belief so small that other deities wouldn't deign to call it a crumb.

At the far end of the alley, a door groaned open. Then a young man stepped out onto the cement steps that led down to the cracked asphalt. His leather jacket hung open against his chest, revealing the silver loop that pierced his left nipple like a sliver of moonlight. Ventl recognized him as one of the alley's regulars. The closest things to worshippers she had. Driven by hunger, Ventl crept closer.

"She's got a binary spin to her body, got shadow and soul pulled apart." The music pounded against Richard as he watched Cassandra leap across Club Femme Totale's small stage. With a slap crowned out by a cymbal crash, her hands caught hold of the brass pole at center stage, and she began to spin, her long, black hair flaring out like a headdress of pure night. No one else moved. Even the waitresses stood and watched, frozen amid forgotten errands. Everyone in view—patrons, performers, and staff—fell under the spell of Cassandra's dance.

Richard remembered something Cassandra had once told him, about how an exotic dancer's art was the same as a magician's, both tricking the audience into abandoning what it knows to be true in favor of what it desperately wants to be true. But until tonight, his first visit to Club Femme Totale, he'd never really understood what she meant.

"...crazy. Starry, star crazy..." Cassandra whirled faster, blurring her body into streaks of black fishnet and rhinestones. Then she released the pole and dropped onto the stage as the song's last notes faded into silence. Her face, carefully twisted toward the audience, burned with rapture.

Of all her stage tricks, all her disappearing acts and illusions, Richard admired this one the most. The way she could make every person in the room believe that her ecstasy belonged to them alone. Even he, who'd seen the way she used the mirrors of her mind to amplify and distort emotion—even he, who knew that she loved Brett, and only Brett—could be momentarily taken in. Could momentarily believe.

But then, he tried so hard to believe.

After a moment of darkness, the lights flashed back on. Richard awoke from Cassandra's trance and began looking for Club Femme Totale's dressing room. Cassandra's instructions led him to find the stage door, which he pushed open to reveal a huge, impassive man.

"Excuse me," Richard began, trying hard to avoid sounding 15 years old. "My name's Richard. Cassandra said that she'd leave a message with you to let me in to see her."

The man stared at him for a moment, then nodded once toward the door. Hurriedly, before he could change his mind, Richard slipped through it. Inside the dressing room, even the air seemed to boil, as steam rolled from the open showers, and each dancer's body carried an fresh heat. Sweat, mingled with even more primal smells, taunted Richard with dim imaginings of things he'd guessed, but hadn't yet touched.

To his relief, he quickly located Cassandra. She stepped out of the showers, rubbing a towel across the makeup permanently tattooed across her face. The lines and colors made her attractive to others, but Richard could never think of them as anything but bruises, like the rest of the surgically sculpted beauty forced on her during the time she'd spent as a rich man's toy. Not that he did n't find her alluring. But it was more in spite of, rather than because of, her perfection.

"Richard," she greeted with a smile. "I see the fake ID worked."

He nodded. Out there, separated by floor and stage, it was easy to believe in Cassandra's universal sorcery. But now, face to face, Richard couldn't imagine her as an enchantress, no matter how hard he tried. He could only see her as she'd been the afternoon Brett introduced her to everyone as his new girlfriend, the way she'd just sat there, picking at the ice cubes in her water glass with perfect, acrylic nails. The confusion of someone lost in a hybrid mix of their house and somewhere entirely else, the silence of a soul caged in a body that was no longer quite its own. Richard sighed. Cassandra was as mortal as he was, and they both had a very mortal problem to deal with.

"Was there something you wanted to tell me?" she pressed.

Again, Richard nodded. There was. But now, faced with her easy cheerfulness, he couldn't initiate the subject he'd come to talk to her about. Instead, he swerved toward a detour. "Have you seen Brett around?"

Cassandra pointed to the dressing room's back door. "Out in the alley. Went to get a breath of fresh air, or something."

Thanks." Still, Richard lingered. It made sense to talk to Brett first, but if Cassandra had guessed, he could sure use the reinforcements. Cassandra [illegible]

Differently. How so?

Like how he never seems to eat or sleep much anymore. Like how he shivers in the heat, and sweats in the cold. Like how he sits, staring into space, and rubs his arm as if he's trying to erase his skin. "I don't know. Just more tense, I guess."

"He's been under a lot of pressure lately. Negotiating the possible sale of some of his songs to one of the big companies." Cassandra trailed off, and an unusual sadness stained her green eyes. "It's not easy trying to build a life together, with Miles still out there, making everything hell. That rich bastard only wants me back because I left him."

Richard touched her arm, wishing he could say something. But every time he tried to comfort Cassandra, his words got so tangled that she ended up comforting him instead. "I'm sure Brett's just a little stressed," he finally managed, trying hard to hide how unconvinced he was.

For a moment, neither of them moved. Then Cassandra conjured her cheerful mood back into place. Gently, she bent over and touched her lips to Richard's, her breath filling his mouth like warm candy. "Give that to Brett, when you find him." Then she walked over to her locker, and Richard started toward the exit.

Back in the alleyway, Venti had circled in on the young man with the leather jacket and pierced nipple. Finally close enough, she bleu on the air next to his feet, hoping to stir up some carelessly discarded plea. And, indeed, a few morsels caught her attention as they lay, scattered on the cracked pavement. But hope soon turned to despair. These were black maggot prayers, writhing blindly on the ground in search of food of their own. Prayers for death, for oblivion, for the ultimate unbelief—worse than the others, because they could transfer themselves from host to host, poisoning all they touched.

And, eventually, killing it.

Venti tried to stomp on them, to squash them beneath her feet, but far greater gods than she were unable to destroy such prayers. They continued to squirm along as if she'd never touched them.

Light burst against brick as the door behind the young man opened, and a younger boy joined him. Venti yelled, trying to warn the newcomer to tell him to go back inside before one of those dark prayers found its way onto him. And for an instant, the boy almost seemed to hear her. For a second, a strange expression crossed his face as he squinted into the alleyway's haphazard darkness.

"I'm here! I'm here!" Venti screamed. But the moment had passed, and the new young man returned his attention to the one already sitting on the steps.

Richard exited through the club's back door, nearly stumbling over Brett, already seated on the steps outside. "Oh, hey," he apologized. "Cassandra said you were out here."

Brett twisted around, pushing a handful of hair out of his face at the same time. Neon light from the surrounding city cast strange patterns of his pale skin. "Hi Richard. What's up?"

"I..." Richard began, digging his hands deep into the pockets of his jeans, as if he could find words there, written on forgotten scraps of paper. "I thought maybe we could talk. For a minute."

"Sure."

Brett scooted to one side of the step, and Richard sat beside him. But his carefully rehearsed speech suddenly seemed arrogant and

naive Long before Richard had ever seen magic in Cassandra, he'd admired Brett Five years older than Richard, Brett had the easy, confident way with people that Richard could only long for. Confidence, combined with ambition so strong it sparked off his body, made Brett seem like a mythical prince—momentarily displaced from his kingdom, but destined to return and rule it one day, nonetheless Richard had never doubted that

Until recently Recently, when thin patches of irritability began to crystallize on the surface of Brett's good nature like premature frost Brittle hysteria replaced passion, and eyes that had once seemed so sure of their manifest destiny grew shallow and gray A whole sky turned to winter And a returning prince found himself lost in the snow

Richard stared at his feet Wind bumped against his tennis shoes as it drove a piece of paper in wild circles, as if some invisible woman were using it to swat equally invisible bugs. For a moment, Richard almost smiled And that made him remember Cassandra's smile, and her kiss for Brett, still clutched to his lips, and he knew he had to do this

"Brett? These last couple of weeks, you've been different Volatile

didn't take long for Miles to show up and tell me about it, to let me know that if I wanted any more he'd be the only place I could get it " Brett shuddered. "God! The way it felt the first time. Like I could do anything "

Richard felt himself sinking deeper and deeper into darkness "You've got to get off it Me and Cassandra, we can help you. There are places—"

Brett thrashed his head back and forth. "No. I've called places. No one's ever heard of the drug, no one knows how to treat it And you can't imagine what withdrawal is like.. " He trailed off, and then exhaled, like a child's toy deflating for the final time. "But you're right It has to end. I won't let him use me against Cassandra "

"What are you going to do?"

Brett shrugged "Miles is meeting me here tonight. I'm going to take what I have left of the stuff and throw it back in his face. Maybe I can make him so mad he won't give me any more. Not even if I beg for it " Another shudder "More likely, he'll just kill me, but God, at least it will be a quick death Not like the one I'm dying now."

"Brett," Richard began, only to find himself once more helpless to comfort Instead, he returned his eyes to the alley wall. What was

Venti leaped for the discarded kiss, but the black maggot prayers had already swarmed over it. She snatched it up anyway, like a child unable to resist a fallen sweet.

Everyone s noticed, but no one wants to say anything, and I know it may be just because you're anxious about selling your songs, or upset about the way Miles is hounding Cassandra, but I have to ask." Richard drew a long breath, pulling the summer night deep into his lungs. "Are you taking something?"

He expected anger or indignant denial, but Brett just turned his body away a little, wrapping his arms around himself with the lethargic hopelessness of a man already consumed by cold. "Yes "

"What?"

"You wouldn't have heard of it No one's heard of it."

"I didn't—" Richard had only meant to express bafflement, not ask a specific question Now he wasn't sure what to do with Brett's answer Brett, who had everything—talent, a promised kingdom, Cassandra. "Why?"

Brett twisted farther away, until all Richard could see was the back of his leather jacket "I didn't mean for it to happen God! I hate myself for letting it happen "

Richard stared at the alley's far wall, crumbling brick held together by spray paint and pieces of old gum Everything falls apart. Why had he expected anything different? Who was he—who were any of them—that they should be spared? A stripper, a street kid, and a junkie. Just three voices, almost raised to screams What could they offer to the universe that would make it keep them safe? "How?" he finally made himself ask

"How?" A sudden hatred entered Brett's voice, startling Richard with its intensity "How does all evil happen in the world? Miles. I was at a meeting about my songs, and one of the reps offered me a hit of some new designer drug I didn't want to look like an innocent kid they could just walk all over." Brett snagged his fingers in his hair like hooks caught in endless mazes of black string, and pulled. "I took the hit "

"And?" Richard didn't want to know, didn't want to relive Brett's fall But he knew he couldn't stop it

"And it was a setup Miles paid the rep to ship the dose to me. It there left to believe in when enchantresses proved to be mortal, and princes fell face down in the mud? As if in answer, the lines of paint and bits of gum blurred, and for an instant he saw the tattered outline of a half-transparent girl, waving her arms and screaming at him Then headlights flooded the alleyway, drowning his imagining in their brightness

The invading limousine rolled to a stop and Brett rose

"Well, here goes nothing."

"Let me—"

No Go back inside "

I

Brett turned, looking back. "Inside Please If this all goes down wrong, someone has to look after Cassandra. Someone has to tell her." He glanced down at his hands, then back up at Richard "Tell her what an ass I was And that it wasn't her fault."

Richard couldn t imagine looking after Cassandra, but he also couldn't see how he could possibly be of any help to Brett So he started back toward the club. As his hand touched the doorknob, he remembered the kiss Cassandra had given him to transport. Carefully, he brushed it from his lips and blew it toward Brett, but his friend had already turned toward the limousine, and Cassandra s promise of love fluttered to the ground behind him, unheard and unaccepted

Aching, Richard stepped back into Club Femme Totale

Venti leaped for the discarded kiss, but the black maggot prayers had already swarmed over it For an instant, she snatched it up anyway, like a child unable to resist a fallen sweet despite the ants covering it But before she could pop it into her mouth, she thought of those prayers inside her, biting her throat as she swallowed them Better to starve than submit herself to that With a shiver of disgust, she dropped the ravaged kiss

She felt weak. Keeping the maggot prayers off the boy had taken far too much of her energy. How could she have wasted her strength like that? How could she have thought he'd see? They never saw. Never acknowledged anything beyond the temporary walls of their bodies, never even hoped for it. A little hope was all she needed. But by the time they ended up in her domain, they'd already plummeted through the fingers of numerous other deities—beliefs that reached out to catch them, but only bruised them as they fell. Once they hit the alley, they barely had the strength to die.

And now the boy was gone, which again left Venti with the unlikely prospect of his friend. Still. The limousine looked promising, a sign of far more luxury than she usually saw. Surely someone that prosperous would have a little belief to spare a starving goddess.

Venti slipped along behind the young man as he approached the limousine, being careful to avoid the occasional black prayer that still writhed off him. After a few steps, the young man stopped beside the limousine and waited. A moment passed, then the passenger door swung open, and an older man, with scrubbing wire curls of hair, stepped out. The neat cut of his suit, and the smell of imported leaves smoked for his pleasure, confirmed Venti's hopes. Definitely rich. Surely the rich believed in so much. Unable to contain her hunger she stretched forward and blew.

Flame storm. Sparks and ash whirled into the air, burning Venti even as she scrambled backward. Fire prayers, popping and crackling each one a tiny hell. Prayers for hate, for vengeance, for the pain of another, they'd burn on the pavement for days without ever using themselves up. Seeing them lying there almost made Venti pray for rain. But who listened to the prayers of gods?

Above her, the young man hurled a small glass bottle down into the middle of the inferno, where it flashed as it shattered, like a burst of lightning. Drops of a clear liquid rose, momentarily, then tumbled back on the pavement, extinguishing the few fire prayers they chanced to touch. Moments later, a syringe bounced down beside the broken glass.

Venti looked up at the young man in the leather jacket with a bit more respect. Only a few fire prayers put out, but still, it was more than she could do. If he still had the strength to do that, then he could do so much more. If only he understood.

Without warning, the older man, the one who'd arrived in the limousine, pulled a gun from his pocket and leveled it at his opponent. Venti didn't normally take sides in mortal conflicts, but she had a feeling about this one. Desperately, she hurled herself at the young man. 'Believe, dammit!' she screamed. "Believe in me! Believe in something!"

But the young man just sank to his knees, the lips of the gun pressed against the back of his head in place of the kiss he'd never felt.

"Cassandra!" Richard lunged for her, but Cassandra had already pushed past him. He could only shout at her back as she ran toward the dressing room's rear exit. "Don't go out there! He'll kill both of you!"

The last few words of his plea smacked against the closing door and slid to the floor in true enchantress fashion. Cassandra had already vanished into the alley. Richard felt the eyes of the other dancers, casually turned toward him, and for their benefit he allowed himself a single heartfelt curse. Then he dashed after Cassandra.

Outside, he found Cassandra, frozen on the final step, and beyond her, Miles, standing in front of the limousine, with his gun to the back of Brett's head. All of them seemed oblivious to Richard's arrival.

"Let him go," Cassandra whispered. Begged. Richard thought he would break, hearing her beg. "I'll come back to you. Do whatever you want. Just don't hurt Brett."

The corner of Miles' mouth curled, like something going rancid, and Richard shut his eyes. But that just replaced the horror of the present with the horror of the future. He knew how this was going to end. His mind played it out for him, the crash of Miles' gun, Brett's head shattering, and Cassandra's shriek as she charged forward. Then another crash. Prince and sorceress, brought down side by side. And as those images rippled through his head, strange memories in future tense, something else swelled up inside him. Something screamed "NO!" at the top of its lungs.

Richard snapped his eyes open, suddenly aware that he'd spoken aloud. Miles' expression had hardly changed, but Cassandra looked like she'd been shocked beyond horror. "Go back inside!" she hissed at him, as if she could undo the last minute. "Quickly. Get out of here."

"No," Richard repeated, his eyes fixed straight ahead. What could he offer the universe? What he'd always offered to his friends—the belief that they were something more than they believed themselves to be. He'd had faith in a prince and an enchantress, and if they were now overwhelmed, it wasn't for lack of hope. It was just that even princes and enchantresses had their limits. He had to believe in something beyond them, beyond everything he knew.

And Richard remembered his half-vision of the girl before the limousine headlights had swept her away. "Goddess," he whispered, not allowing himself to feel even the slightest bit silly. Just believing with everything he had. "Help us. Please."

The prayer shot from the boy, flying high over the embers and writhing maggots. Venti caught it with the whole of her body. Yes, oh yes, mouthful after mouthful filling her, bringing all her strength flooding back. Not a feast, not a delicacy, but enough. More than enough. By the time she'd licked the last bit of belief from her fingers, she knew what to do.

Venti drew the wind toward her, pulling it down from its resting places on the tops of buildings, untangling it from wires and conduits, coaxing it from the cracks between bricks. Pulled it to her, and spun it together into a cyclone that whipped across the alleyway, sucking all the rotted, diseased, evil prayers into its currents. For a single instant it drew itself up and swayed before the man with the gun, like a cobra, before it spat every speck of spoiled belief into his face.

At first the man didn't seem to react, as the flames burned his skin, and the maggot prayers writhed across his face, crawling up his nose and into the corners of his mouth. Then, slowly, he raised the gun from the back of the young man's head. Venti hardly dared to move. There were people—people so empty that even evil prayers couldn't affect them. But not this man. Wordlessly, he returned his gun to his pocket, and got back in the limousine. A few moments later, its headlights retreated from the alley like a pair of lost searchlights.

Venti grinned and curtsied to the boy. Then she let herself rise up into the night.

A week passed before Richard again stood in the alleyway. With Brett in the hospital, still coming down off whatever drug Miles had given him, and Cassandra usually at his side, there hadn't been any reason to visit Club Femme Totale. Until he'd heard, early that evening, on every source of news that he passed—after days of seclusion, Miles Hunter, chief executive of Sound Waves, had ended his life by putting a bullet in his head.

Richard stared up at the sky, acutely aware of the layers and layers of universe that stretched out all around him. Someone, somewhere, must have once believed him into existence. Then his belief shaped a goddess. And who knew where she was now, or what her belief was summoning? Did it ever end? Or begin?

"Thank you," Richard whispered. Then he uncurled his fingers, letting loose a scattering of small prayers, which fell into the alley like a handful of breadcrumbs. "Thank you."

And, for a moment, the wind seemed to answer him.

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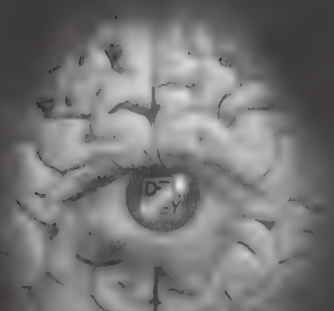

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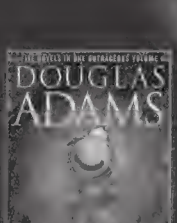

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DEL REY Stories That Define Imagination
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By Eric T. Baker

Playing *Final Fantasy X* on the PS2 feels like you are being drawn into a movie.

Final Fantasy X from Squaresoft Games for the PlayStation2 is the latest installment of the long-running line of fantasy role-playing console games, but players don't have to have played any of the previous nine adventures to enjoy this one. Part game, part interactive fiction, playing *FFX* feels like you are being drawn into a movie.

The pattern of the game is player-controlled moments framed by cut scenes. Sometimes the player just moves the character around until it reaches the next cut scene. Other times you guide the character through turn-based battles.

Final Fantasy X *takes Squaresoft's long-running RPG series to new heights on the PlayStation2.*

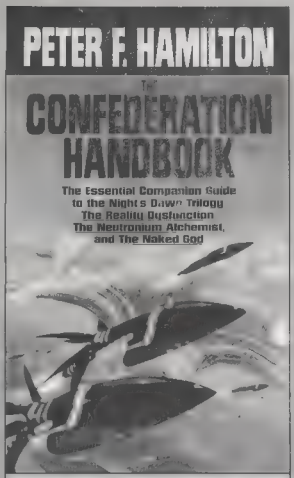
The lead character is Tidus, a star Blitzball player whose life is brutally changed when a match he's playing is disrupted by a powerful creature known as Sin who destroys Tidus's city with a tsunami, missiles, and an army of creatures. As the city falls about him, Tidus is led from the wreckage and directly toward Sin by Auron, a grizzled warrior. Fighting through a number of creatures, Auron leads Tidus literally into Sin, where Tidus passes out. He awakens a thousand years in the future and begins a series of fish-out-of-water scenes.

Tidus eventually finds his way in this new world, latching onto a group of guardians whose mission may lead him home again. The first companion is Wakka, who is handy with a blitzball which, mixed with a bit of magic, proves deadly to flying creatures. Lulu and Kimahri Ronso come along next. Lulu is a practitioner of the dark arts that are element based. Kimahri Ronso is a cat humanoid with a large physical presence and a knack for magically siphoning powers from his enemies. This collection of heroes guards a new "summoner," a young woman named Yuna, who invokes the powers that oppose Sin. She is making a pilgrimage to each of the world's temples. At each site she is tested and, if found worthy, granted additional powers.

The game allows the player to control the character's development by use of a sphere grid. The characters gain movement levels to move across the grid spaces, and can then use spheres they've acquired to purchase abilities available in that part of the grid. This process manages to make a game of the character-development process itself.

The controls are very easy to use. Movement is straightforward, and combat is turn-based, which allows lots of time to consider each move. *FFX* only allows saving between segments so it is best to save when you're given the chance. The only complaint about the game is that the story is quite linear. As long as the characters survive the battles, they keep moving on. Simply losing a battle doesn't necessarily end the story, but it doesn't change it either.

NEW FROM ASPECT



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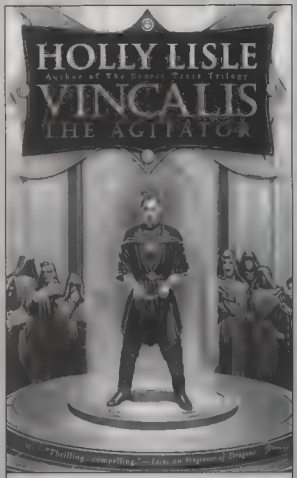

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Final Fantasy X is a terrific console role-playing game. Even if it is the first installment of the series that players have picked up, they'll be able to enjoy it just as much as long-time fans. The richness of the world experience offsets the lineariness of the plot.

A computer role-playing game with a very different feel is *Gorasul: The Legacy of the Dragon* from JoWooD Productions. Unlike *FFX*, which is created in Japan and takes place in what might be called a "high anime fantasy" world, *Gorasul* was produced in Germany and it is set in the common "medieval/Tolkien fantasy" world that players have come to expect from decades of games and fantasy novels.

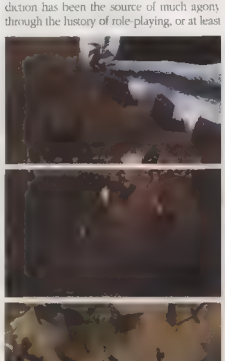
Another way in which *Gorasul* is a more traditional game is in its approach to character creation. The player starts with two characters, picking a class for one of them (warrior, wizard, cleric, paladin, ranger) and an item type (sword, bow, ax, etc.) for the other, then adjusting their statistics. What isn't traditional is that one of the characters is a legendary hero raised by a dragon and now back from the dead. The other character is his enchanted and intelligent weapon. In this way, the game owes more to *Elric* than it does to Tolkien. And it is pretty damn cool to start the game with not only a great magic weapon, but also nifty dragon powers.

The other cool part of *Gorasul* is its difficulty settings. The game can be set for hard, normal, or easy, but it can also be set for mostly puzzles, mostly combat, or a mix. This is a terrific feature since it not only lets players tailor the game to their taste, but it also adds replay value to the experience. Of course, with four CDs of game world to explore, *Gorasul* certainly doesn't depend on replay value to be worth the purchase price.

The best paper-and-dice role-playing game currently on the market, *Sorcerer*, has its first supplement out. *Sorcerer and Sword* from Adept Press does two things simultaneously. It provides a guide for using the *Sorcerer* rules to play adventures in the pulp fantasy worlds inspired by the works of writers like Robert E. Howard and Michael Moorcock. At the same time, it tries to change the fundamental way that players think about how RPGs should be played. Right at the beginning of Chapter 1, Ron Edwards, the designer, puts it this way:

> This entire supplement throws out one of the most cherished passages in role-playing texts, the one about how the GM is the storyteller person and the player acts out the part of the character. In order for this supplement to be useful or to make any sense at all, you must take that concept and kill it cleanly with your sword.

It is flatly impossible for one person to author a story' and the other to 'determine the actions of the protagonist.' This contradiction has been the source of much agony through the history of role-playing, or at least



the brand of role playing which concerns itself with creating stories.

What Edwards proposes is accepting that the goal of the game is creating stories about one or more heroic protagonists, and then acknowledging that the players will make the protagonists' decisions and thus create the story. The GM's role is to make it possible for play to occur. GMs have great powers over events in the game world, but their job is to fully respond to the characters' actions. In other words, the "story" comes out of the interaction of players and the GM, not out of the GM's "guiding" or "leading" the players' characters down the "correct" path. Edwards asks GMs to take the role of inspiring and facilitating, but not dictating.

SGS is a different sort of supplement just as *Sorcerer* is a different sort of game. Chapter 2 is Edwards' annotated bibliography of the pulp fantasy writing that inspired the supplement. It is Chapter 4 and nearly page 40 of a 110-page book before

anything that would customarily be called a rule appears. There are rules, expanding and changing the character generation and play aspects of the *Sorcerer* rules to fit a fantasy setting, but more space is given to guidelines for shaking up how players are used to approaching their gaming.

In *Sorcerer*, for example, characters are built with a "kicker," something that happened to them that pushed them out of their day-to-day lives and into being a protagonist in an adventure. When the kicker is resolved, players get to remake their characters completely to fit their next kicker. In *SGS* Edwards adds rules for playing characters "out of order." That is, starting the campaign with an adventure where the characters are the experienced rulers of a kingdom, then adjusting the characters' abilities *down* and going back and playing an adventure when they were first raw barbarians coming down from the mountains. This is a completely revolutionary idea (nearly every computer RPG is based on the idea of getting better), but it makes sense if the players' goal is to tell the interesting parts of their characters' lives.

Part rulebook, part manifesto, part personal history, *SGS* is a well-written, well-considered joy to read. It isn't for everyone. Some players will not be willing to grant Edwards' basic assumptions, and those players are likely to feel as if they are being told they are playing "wrong." Those players who are willing to examine the way they are used to playing RPGs, however, will find much to reward them in this terrific book.

The first release in Decipher, Inc.'s new *Lord of the Rings Roleplaying* line is the *Lord of the Rings Roleplaying Adventure Game*, a boxed set that lets three or more players take the roles of the Fellowship of the Ring and try

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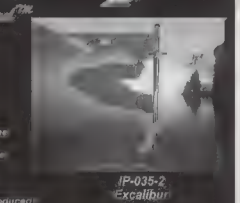

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to survive the Mines of Moria. The box contains a handout defining just what role-playing is, a book of background about Middle Earth, a book for adventuring in Moria, character sheets for each of the nine members of the Fellowship, cardboard counters for keeping track of the characters on the two full color maps, fast play rules for those who don't want to read the whole Moria book, and six six-sided dice.

The big difference between this boxed set and the RPG to come is that the adventure game is meant to be self-contained. The adventure book, *Through the Mines of Moria*, included in the box is meant to be played out over a session or three. By the end of those sessions the players will have been introduced to all the mechanics of the system and have gotten a feel for what role playing can be. It is possible to take the characters and carry on, but *Welcome to Middle Earth*, the background book in the box, while a good overview of Tolkien's world, doesn't include any statistics for the people and creatures it mentions. Thus, it isn't as helpful for setting up an on-going campaign in Middle Earth as it could be.

The box and everything in it are beautiful, with full-color covers and art that is mostly screen captures from the *LotR* movie. Even the character sheets are full color and printed on slick paper. The counters are also printed photos of the creatures and people from the movie.

For those who are new to role-playing or to the *LotR*, the adventure game is a good place to start. More experienced players will probably want to wait for the full game, unless they are looking for something to recruit new players to their hobby.

Deathright, a Dungeons & Dragons adventure from Kenzer & Company set in their *Kingdoms of Kalamar* world, is another in their great *ImageQuest* series. It contains maps and lots of pictures, plus the information and statistics for the monsters and NPCs are all organized at the back of the book, right where the Game Master can easily find them. The many pictures are keyed to the text so that wherever there is text to read to the players there is also a picture to show them.

Intended for 8th- and 9th level characters, *Deathright* has an excellent back-story that not only drives the action of the plot, but also gives the GM reason to keep the characters in the region where the events are under way. It is one of those well-done adventures where it is just about impossible for the players to simply turn their backs and walk away. Not only are the stakes for the world too high, but the personal stakes for the characters are too high. *Deathright* puts the characters into a situation they have to solve.

Time of Tumult is an adventure source book for *Exalted*, White Wolf's game of lost world superheroics. It is a very different resource than *Deathright*, but it is exactly what *Exalted* has needed since it was released. The world of *Exalted* is huge, multifaceted, and exciting, but to this point, every supplement has left the Game Master with the question, "But what do I actually do?" *ToT* contains three adventures (one long, two shorter) set in three different parts of the *Exalted* world. The first and longest is a quest followed by a dungeon crawl. The second is a mission of diplomacy and investigation in a hostile archipelago, and the last is a scramble to head off a dimensional invasion by the servants of a hungry god.

As a setting and a place to adventure, *Exalted* simply rocks. All the elements of great pulp and martial arts and manga fiction are included. Every player character is powerful and heroic, and all the bad guys are powerful and complex. *ToT* is well worth the money because its 168 pages distill the world down to three manageable adventures. Even if a GM never runs his players through all of these adventures, just reading the book will give GMs a better handle on what to do with their players in this world. The only drawback is that there is no index and all the characters and their statistics are scattered throughout the text, so GMs may want to read with a pad of Post-It notes handy. ❧

letters

Continued from page 10

over again, and let's not even TALK about Danuelle Steel), so — well, as I say, I understand his frustration.

But thank you for at least ADMITTING that the system sucks.

Now, I KNOW you can't accept e-mail submissions, because AOL would send ninjas to murder you gruesomely over your breakfast McMuffin if you ever even HINTED you would accept e-mail submissions. I know that. I'm not hinting. *[It's not AOL. It's me. Is. I will not accept downloads from strangers and will not read anything longer than an e-mail on my screen.—ed.]*

BUT (two buts).

Could you guys send me via e-mail an author's guideline thingie? *[nope. snail mail only. sorry.—ed.]* I promise after you do I will (sigh) pick one of my many short stories and print it out and put it in an envelope (with absolutely no anthrax, but hey, nuke it any way, I would) and send it to you through the ever tediously slow material realm and wait and wait and wait and WAIT like I ALWAYS do whenever I submit any of my cogent and witty and brilliant work anywhere, because the world SUCKS and no one will take e-mail submissions. *[Neither will we. Not no how. not no way.—ed.]*

Second BUT: Here's a synopsis of a few of my better short stories (two sentences each, at most! Come on! So far I've been witty and incisive and made you laugh a couple of times *[nope.—ed.]*, give me another minute here! *[nope again.—ed.]*) and if any of them really strike you as being Just Your Cup Of Tea, I'd love it if you'd let me know. (It's not me, it's the world, we NEED an edge just to get anywhere these days.) *[Sorry, I don't accept e-mail submissions. Ever, in any format, under any circumstances. They were deleted unread from this letter.—ed.]*

Darren "Doc" Nebula" Madigan
Tampa, Florida

Darren, has it perhaps occurred to you that it is just this approach that has gotten you bounced from such diverse venues as Steve Jackson Games and Del Rey Books (which is, by the way, the same as Ballantine)? We've seen enough cute (and trying to be cute) letters to last us a lifetime. You can't sneak in under the fence, and you can't snarkily get people to change the rules for you, and if you haven't heard in 365 days, I think you can safely assume your book has not been accepted for publication. BTW, did you include an SASE with your submissions? If not, that's why you haven't heard.

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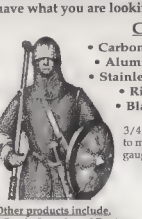

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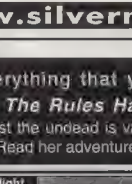

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lindeman's life

Continued from page 61

"Oh my Lord!" the man screamed.

Lindeman settled and whispered, "Read. Remember who you are."

The man looked around again for the source of the voice. Eyes wide and hands shaking, he finally stooped to pick up the papers from the remains of the splintered box.

"Old journals," he said.

"Journals," Lindeman echoed.

"Underground railroad," the man said.

Railroad," Lindeman echoed.

"They hid in the old courthouse." The man smiled. "Lists! They're all here!" The man jumped up from the mess, a cracked, leather-bound ledger in his hands. "Names, dates, origins, destinations!" The man was crying again.

"Why are you crying?" Lindeman asked.

"Thank you, ghost! Thank you!" The man ran from the room, through Lindeman's halls, and out into the night.

Lindeman sighed. He had wanted to help.

Time passed. Except for the cars that lived there during the day, Archie's lot stood empty through season after season. A hawk built a nest on Lindeman's roof and used the heat from the black stone of the lot to rise high into the sky to hunt his pigeons.

Lindeman watched sunrises and sunsets. He watched snows come and go. He took pride in his work and his service. Then, one day, he heard the mayor talking about him with a new voice, this man in a blue suit. "Asbestos," the man said. "The paint, the insulation, the pipe wrappings."

"Computers," the mayor said. "Connectivity."

Big shovels came to Archie's lot. They dug a deeper hole than Lindeman had ever seen. Pile drivers slammed shining steel into the bedrock under Lindeman. His basement shook. Papers fell from shelves, and his rats hid in their holes.

A new building grew. It looked tall and fragile. Every inch of it was covered in black glass. Lindeman's dingy stone and paint-peeling windows were reflected in the glass. He felt small and old. He wondered if that was how Archie had felt when Lindeman was born.

Eventually, people took his furniture. They took his files. They even emptied his basement of Archie's memories.

One day, a band came. A small crowd of men and women in dark suits gathered on the sidewalk to dedicate the new building. A larger group of people with cameras surrounded them.

"New and full of yourself, aren't you?" Lindeman thought the aged, gravelly voice was Archie; but Archie was gone. Then he realized he'd spoken the words himself.

"Who are you?" the tall, young building asked.

"I'm Lindeman. Do you know who you are?"

The new tower gleamed in the sun. It stretched for the sky. "I'm the Heartland County Courthouse, Sheriff's offices, State Records Extension, and Federal Services building. Call me Stack."

"The hawks will like you."

"My windows are bird proof and tinted for privacy. They keep out the sun, and I never need paint." The new building paused to stretch a little more toward the sky. "You sure could use a coat around the windows. Maybe a little sandblasting to brighten the granite, eh?"

"True enough," Lindeman said. "I'm old. I was born in a time of iron, coal, and granite. My floors are yellowed. My walls are stained. It's been years since they painted me. I don't smell like the future, and we are all moving into the future. Things change. We age."

"I'm built to change," Stack said. "I have synthetic, modular office space to maximize transition efficiency. I'm fully wired for wide-area-network, LAN, and DSL services. There are no toxic materials in me, and my lighting is energy efficient, ergonomic, and mood-enhancing."

"That's nice," Lindeman said. "Enjoy it."

"You're jealous because you're obsolete."

"No, I'm wondering if I'll become an archive."

"I doubt it. You're not wired for databases. Your ducts are probably contaminated. Your paint is full of lead, and your floor tiles are asbestos. You're going to be my parking lot."

"Probably so," Lindeman said. Hadn't Archie become his parking lot? But before that, Archie had helped Lindeman learn who he was and what he could do for his people. Lindeman might be able to do that for Stack.

But there was no time. The crane came.

Lindeman watched as the men set up the ball. He looked away toward the shimmering lake when the crane's motor started. He waited for the impact, but it didn't come.

Lindeman heard women singing. He looked down onto Taft. There was a line of women in front of the crane.

"Who are they?" the new courthouse asked.

"Friends," Lindeman said.

The crane waited, its tall skeleton casting a shadow on Taft.

The women marched and sang. Some were old. Some had marched when Lindeman was young, when Archie still cared for the lists of their children. Some had sons or fathers whose names were on the stones in his yard by the cannon. They covered Lindeman's steps with flowers.

Night and day, the women stayed with him. Others joined them. Whole families of black men and women filled his halls, his steps, and his yard.

"Who are they?" Stack asked.

"More friends," Lindeman said.

The crane went away.

"How'd you get so many friends?" the young building asked.

"I'm old," Lindeman said.

Workmen came.

The Friends of Lindeman let the workmen past.

The workmen sealed Lindeman in plastic and wore masks and suits that covered their skin, like they were afraid to touch him. They tore at his ceilings and walls. They ripped at his wood.

Lindeman shook in fear. His pigeons fled.

Then, one day, the plastic was gone. The masks were gone. The Friends of Lindeman arrived with paint, new wood, and tile. They fixed, finished, and polished. They brought back his furniture. They brought back his paintings.

Finally, they draped his freshly sandblasted granite in red, white, and blue banners. A red ribbon once more stretched between the pillars in front of his walnut doors.

Lindeman looked out on the intersection of Ash and Taft, where the tree streets meet with street named for the president that had once been the last. A crowd of people danced and sang to old-time marches played by a brass band.

A horse and carriage rolled up next to an old motorcar. The polished chrome on both flashed in the sun. An old black man in a black suit put a brass plaque on Lindeman's great walnut doors. The man turned to the crowd. A tear rolled down his cheek.

In spite of his fuller face and gray hair, Lindeman recognized him as the man who had cried in his basement.

The old man said, "My great grandmother had from slavery, in the cellars of the old, old courthouse. I found her journals in the basement of this building. My father was a judge here. I was married here. The lives of my family and all the families of this county have revolved around this building for a hundred years. So, it gives me great personal pleasure to open the Lindeman National Historical Courthouse and Museum. May it stand through the next millennium as a reminder to the people of Ohio and this great Nation. We must never forget who we are."

Together, the man and women cut the red ribbon and opened Lindeman's doors.

"They saved you," the new courthouse said. "Why?"

"I never let them forget who they were," he answered.

"But you're old and—"

"And you're the future," Lindeman interrupted. "So was I, once. So was I."

The long afternoon passed into evening, and the people went home. Lindeman's pigeons were settling their heads under their wings when Stack spoke again. "Can you show me how to help them remember?" He twisted a little to keep a chill wind off Lindeman's granite walls.

"I can show you what I know," Lindeman said. He looked up from his skylights at the first stars in the clear Ohio sky and gave thanks to the powers of imagination, stone, and fire. Finally, he whispered, "Thank you, Archie." ❧

fiery horse

Continued from page 47

stretched arms and howling mouths. A sea of ghosts. As the tide washed against her, she could hear and taste and smell each one.

"I had a plan to save the Empire, but I was only a girl." Fish soaked in vinegar.

"Momma!" Stale mooncakes.

"My wealth filled five storehouses, and bought me every woman but the one I wanted." The lingering aroma of tea-smoked duck.

So many voices of ghosts long past, whispering in her ears. Young people, old people, even the high-pitched wail of the newly born. The roar of voices was louder than the Central Square Market at midday. How could he stand to have so much crammed into his head?

Are you certain you wish to stay?

"Yes." She imagined a sandy path with the firmness of a beach at low tide. It rose up out of the sea of ghosts, extending through the whole of Tsi Sha's vast open mind. And then she turned to him with a grin. "Slow, slow, slow. Do you have feet or do you slide on snot like a snail?"

He laughed and the chase was on.

Texture and sensual detail flowed into the dream. The flowers on the path started as no more than dots of color, and then bloomed into heavily scented peonies, chrysanthemums, and poppies. The path changed from sand to dirt to cobblestone and back to sand again, but always seemed too fragile. The sea of ghosts washed on either side, spraying the air with their memories and sorrows and calling Li Chi to join them. She ran harder, her feet leaving behind deep footprints in the wet sand.

Chi led the running, but Tsi Sha controlled the dream. At one point, he made her run the race of nightmares, falling farther and farther behind the harder she ran. She slipped and clawed at the wet sand, unable to keep from sliding backward toward Tsi Sha.

She panicked. Though it was important that she lose, she could not afford to lose too soon. The sea of ghosts splashed the path in front of Tsi Sha. The taste that accompanied the splash was as familiar and nourishing as fresh steamed rice. Po Ta. A whisper brushed her ear, "I follow you." She raced forward again, stretching the path to the farthest corners of Tsi Sha's mind.

There is no escape. Why do you continue to run?

"I want to see all of you. To know all of you, the way you will soon know me."

Very well.

He began to toy with her, slowing her legs and twisting her path, and then releasing her to run again. At last she came to a craggy stone in the middle of the sea of ghosts. It was empty, and she could feel it calling to her, a hungry void that begged to be filled.

"This stone ..." she paused, looking for the right words. "This bleak place is the seat of your soul, isn't it?"

You could call it that.

She toughened her resolve and ran through it. Here alone the voices were silent. There was nothing but an unyielding stone that all the ghosts in the world would not wash away. Not even moss could grow here, and an overwhelming emptiness closed around her.

When at last she backed away, he was right behind her.

I have caught you. He was breathing heavily, and his body pressed hard against hers.

"So you have," Li Chi said, fearing that at any moment the skin of the man would split, allowing the serpent to emerge reborn. "And now that you have me, what will you do?"

Whatever I wish. He leaned forward and licked her ear. *You named me husband. I think perhaps we will have one consummation, and then the other.*

A consummation. Perhaps it would take the full dance of clouds and rain to bring this to an end. Her heart pounded, and she realized that her father had not devoted enough time to this part of the scenario. Would she even know what to do? She forced herself to relax in his arms, but now she was trembling with fear as much as desire. "You rule all you survey, mate of my soul."

She reached up and kissed him, pressing her lips fiercely against his. He laughed and slid his hands under the fabric of her tunic, parting her lips with his tongue. When at last he entered her, she knew she had failed. Nothing had changed. Soon it would be over, and she would be one more ghost washing up against the void in his soul.

He shuddered mid-climax and gasped with shock. His breathing grew ragged and his hold on her faltered. He fell. When the ghosts began to shout her name, she realized that she had not failed after all.

I don't understand. What is ... what is ...

"Happening?" She knelt over him and took his hand. "Death has come for you, Dream Stalker."

I am Tsi Sha. What could ... How ...

"Fiery Horses kill the husbands that try to rule them. I am your toxin. It is as much a part of my nature as the legions of ghosts are of yours. In our run, I left my footprints all over your soul and reached its very seat. There is no escaping me."

I would have treasured you forever. His golden eyes clouded, and his shimmering scales slowly turned gray.

"I know," she said, stroking his forehead, "but I would rather live."

His lips parted. Whatever reply he would have made was lost as his body faded back into the dreamlands. Then the ghost sea stilled, finding rest at last.

Li Chi brushed the sand from her legs and stood. The whole of the dreamlands lay before her.

She took off running.

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One of the founders of *USA TODAY* and first art director of the national children's newspaper *Pennywhistle Press,* **WEB BRYANT** is currently senior illustrator for *USA TODAY.* His graphics and illustration career has led him through jobs with the *Washington Star, Baltimore Sun,* and *Norfolk Ledger-Star.* He has won Gold, Silver, and Awards of Merit from the Society of Newspaper Design, awards of merit in the *Print Regional Design Annual,* and the *Graphis Annual.* His freelance work is diverse. The American Bar Association commissioned him to create a retirement portrait of Justice Thurgood Marshall. Other clients have included ComSat Inc., AFL-CIO, the National Baseball Hall of Fame, and *Air and Space* magazine.

Born in Rochester, New York, **ALLEN DOUGLAS** stepped eastward to study at Syracuse University and graduated in 1994 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. Immediately after graduating, he relocated to New York City to pursue a career in freelance illustration. The guidance of well-known science fiction and fantasy artist Donato Giancola and the influences of a staff position at the Society of Illustrators have assisted the development of his career and, as a result, his recognition in the field is starting to grow. The range of subject matter of his paintings varies from science fiction and fantasy to wildlife and portraiture. Clients include Tor Books, *Realms of Fantasy, InQuest Gamer* magazine, Lowell House Publishing, Dark Highway Press, Eden Studios, and Iron Crown Enterprises. His original paintings are created using oils on archival paper mounted on masonite. He is a member of the Association of Science-Fiction & Fantasy Artists.

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Born in a Fiery Horse year, **HILARY MOON MURPHY** has run people ragged ever since. She works as a librarian, pandering banned books to unsuspecting children. Her favorite unsuspecting child is her toddler, Cassie, who passionately consumes literature and may some day read it.

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PATRICE SARATH is a writer and editor in Austin, Texas. She has sold stories to various science fiction and fantasy publications, including *Black Gate, Beyond the Rose, Such a Pretty Face,* and *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine.* When she isn't writing fiction, she writes business articles and marketing copy for one of the last dot-coms in existence. She is married with two children.

ERIC M. WITCHEY is a writer living near Portland, Oregon. He is a graduate of Clarion West and has won recognition from Writers of the Future, New Century Writers, and Writer's Digest. This is his first appearance in *Realms of Fantasy,* and he thanks the Wordos writers' group in Eugene, Oregon for their help in bringing Lindeman and Archie to life.

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